



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

The place, particularly its bushland that dominates the town's western skyline, is a significant landmark because it reinforces the town's character of a town in a forest. (Criterion 1.3)

The components of *Old Hospital Complex* collectively form an historical precinct and a significant streetscape which is reinforced by the old houses on the other side of Tunbridge Street. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Old Hospital Complex was constructed to service the needs of the people of the group settlement scheme of 1922-1928, which was to develop the Margaret River region and substantial parts of the south-west of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

Old Hospital Complex was established at a turning point in the evolution of the Margaret River region and was the first public amenity established in the shire. (Criterion 2.2)

Margaret Cecil Rest House is of historical interest because its construction was directly the result of the sense of 'noblesse oblige' prevalent in English society before the First World War. The sense of responsibility and the inherent sense of superiority that accompanies it are the hallmarks of both a class and a time now irrevocably changed. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Old Hospital Complex represents a distinctive style of construction that is the result of response to Australian conditions rather than the use of European styles and techniques. A reliance on local materials, led to new fastening and construction techniques. (Criterion 3.1)

With adequate interpretation, it has the potential to promote a wider understanding of the needs of prenatal women in the isolation and poverty of the group settlement era, which was a feature of European occupation of the south-west region. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Old Hospital Complex is significant to women and children of the area due to social networks established while women prepared for childbirth. Their stay at *Margaret Cecil Rest House*, during the group settlement era, was one of the few opportunities for women from remote areas to meet other women of the district and to exchange ways of tackling the difficulties of the era. (Criterion 4.1)

Old Hospital Complex is significant to the community's image of Margaret River. This is a highly visual reminder that Margaret River was a town in a forest. This image is of extreme importance to many of the area's present inhabitants and the retention of this place with its bushland helps maintain an increasingly fragile sense of communal place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Old Hospital Complex is significant in that groups of buildings and sites of this type are becoming increasingly rare due to the 'end of useful life' maintenance programmes the state government applies to outdated public facilities scheduled for replacement. When this type of place becomes redundant decay tends to accelerate, from an already poor condition, unless a new use is established which can maintain the buildings. Similar facilities in the south-west have been dismantled by the government when made redundant and others destroyed by vandalism. (Criterion 5.1)

The place demonstrates a distinctive design style which, although simple, is becoming less common due to material shortages and escalating material costs. Although the style was evolved to utilise the most common and inexpensive of materials (jarrah), changing conditions have now made this an expensive way to build and is now considered to be an inappropriate use of a dwindling timber resource. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The rudimentary construction and utilitarian simplicity of *Old Hospital Complex* is representative of the architectural norms prevailing between 1922 and 1928, in country public architecture associated with the group settlement scheme. (Criterion 6.1)

The place demonstrates a logical response to a particular and fairly limited environment. It is representative of its class not only because of limited structural resources used but also because, being predominantly government supplied, it was built to the fairly uniform standard prevailing at that time. Its simplicity and lack of ornamentation are the result of the need to extract maximum benefit from every available resource, a characteristic that runs through all government buildings of that era. (Criterion 6.1)

The existing bushland setting for the place is indicative of the original context of the 'cottage hospital built on the edge of the forest'. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

Old Hospital Complex is structurally sound and serviceable, although current funding does not allow adequate maintenance to be performed to preserve the buildings, nor restoration to be undertaken. The place had not been upgraded in the last years of operation as a hospital and the change of use to community centre has ensured that the buildings remain serviceable.

Notwithstanding the poor condition of some paint, finishes and roof sheeting on all of the buildings, the place is still valuable for its aesthetic, historical, scientific and social significance.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The change in function from hospital to community centre has resulted in some significant changes to the internal layout of the hospital building and

the nurses quarters to suit their new purpose. The current usage is compatible with the buildings' current form and layout. The *Margaret Cecil Rest House* has not been altered significantly from when it was a permanent care unit and its current use as TAFE classrooms and offices is compatible with the building's form and layout. Although the current management has no time frame for restoration of the buildings, the current usage of the *Old Hospital Complex* has the potential to provide funds for restoration either from income or further grant funding.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Old Hospital Complex, with the retention of all the building components of the original development including additions, although the form of the original hospital building (1924) is not immediately obvious due to the many additions over the years. The alterations in the 1970s detracts from the original style of the complex; however, the materials used are similar to those of the original buildings. Alterations undertaken in 1993 added several verandahs and other minor details which were designed to complement the original style and are constructed of materials similar to that of the original buildings.

Despite the authenticity of the physical structure, the lack of original fittings and fixtures *Old Hospital Complex* retains a moderate level of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The town of Margaret River is the principal town in the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River, although the coastal town of Augusta, on the southern boundary of the shire near Cape Leeuwin, was first settled by Europeans in 1830.¹ Establishment of farming and timber industries developed northwards from this settlement to the rest of the shire.

The unique qualities of the hardwood *Eucalyptus Marginata* (jarrah) was acknowledged in 1832, when the success of repairs to the hull of *H.M.S. Success* prompted British naval authorities to investigate the use of the timber for shipbuilding.² Jarrah was a much more dense timber than the traditional construction timbers used elsewhere at the time and was impervious to rot and termite resistant. The first shipment of jarrah left Augusta in 1852 but the unique qualities of the timber, particularly its inability to float in water, made the venture unprofitable.³

Alfred and Ellen Bussell began settlement near Margaret River with the building of their homes at *Ellensbrook* (1854) and *Wallcliffe House* (1865).

The local timber industry became significant when M. C. Davies established a mill, considerable transport infrastructure and the town of Karridale in 1882, twenty-five kilometres south of the Margaret River. The expansion of the timber industry began to redress the balance of trade and help lift the colony out of depression. By 1910, the hunger for timber had decimated the forest, bringing to an end the prosperity and vitality of Karridale.⁴ With the closure of the mill, Karridale also closed. The town of Margaret River was established (circa 1910) and became the service centre for the region.

Margaret River developed primarily during the 1920s, with the 'Group Settlement Scheme' (1922-1930). The scheme grew from Premier Sir James Mitchell's desire to develop primary industry to a stage where Western Australia was self sufficient.⁵ The government offered migrants from Britain assisted passage, temporary accommodation, employment in country areas for a probationary period, and sustenance money. The scheme involved groups of twenty-four men working co-operatively to establish blocks for farming, and free title was issued when blocks were prepared for settlement. An advance party travelled ahead and built temporary corrugated iron huts for the group, using construction methods that would not damage the sheets which were reused for roofing settlers' houses. All other materials for settlers' houses were milled from local jarrah trees and a team of government employed carpenters travelled around the region building the standard 'group house'. According to Architect, Linton Hodsdon, the hardness and

¹ Cresswell, G. J. *The Light of Leeuwin. The Augusta - Margaret River Shire History* (The Augusta - Margaret River Shire History Group, Perth, 1989) p. 46.

² *ibid.*, p. 69.

³ *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 167.

strength of the jarrah timber led to modified methods of construction and new modes of fastening which are unique.⁶

Promotion of the scheme to prospective British settlers portrayed a false image of an idyllic 'picture of contentment' and 'prosperity for all'.⁷ Ill prepared migrants, an overly optimistic government and poor knowledge of appropriate farming practices contributed to the failure of the scheme after much hardship and heartbreak for settlers, many of whom abandoned their holdings. The failure of scheme compounded the government's problem of high establishment costs and little financial return.⁸ The remaining inhabitants were left short of amenities and the government short of funds to provide them.

With the appointment of Dr Rigby as District Medical Officer in August 1923 plans were initiated for a hospital in Margaret River, to serve the needs of the increasing population of the region resulting from the Group Settlement Scheme. The hospital building was completed in May 1924 and, being the first government supplied public access amenity established in the shire, was seen as a commitment by the state to the long term future of the area and, specifically, to the town of Margaret River as its principal town. This commitment marked the turning point in the evolution of the Margaret River region which, prior to the 1920s, was primarily valued for the exploitative potential of its forests.

Lady Alicia Cecil, wife of British Minister, the Right Hon. Sir Evelyn Cecil, GBE, MP from the Overseas Delegation, and her daughter Margaret visited the area in 1926, to 'see how English women were faring in their new country'.⁹ They found that transport for pregnant women in remote and isolated areas was a problem, with women close to childbirth often choosing to camp on the hospital verandah rather than risk not arriving in time.¹⁰ Lady Alicia and Margaret felt that a rest house was needed so, upon their return to England, Margaret sent out an appeal to the Margarets of Britain to raise funds to build it. £1,200 was raised from donations, '... funds raised through a bridge-tournament and exhibition of Lady Cecil's and her daughter's sketches, and by the sale of some old pictures given by Lady Knox.'¹¹ This benevolence was indicative of the sense of 'noblesse oblige' that still pervaded the British aristocracy in the aftermath of the First World War. The sense of responsibility and the inherent sense of superiority that accompanies it are the hallmarks of both a class and a time now irrevocably changed.

Margaret Cecil Rest House was completed in 1929 and opened in May 1930. The association with the Cecil family continued for over thirty years, with initially '... linen and blankets of 'the finest quality', monogrammed dinner set, a gramophone, records and books ...' and later, food parcels being sent out,

⁶ Conversation with Linton Hodsdon.

⁷ Cresswell, p. 169.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁹ 'History of the Margaret River Hospital' (MRCRC, Margaret River, 1993).

¹⁰ Cresswell, p. 195.

¹¹ 'Log book of contributions to the Margaret Cecil Rest House appeal'- the book is held on display at the new Margaret River Hospital . (England, c. 1930) Introductory page.

until Margaret Cecil died in 1963.¹² With the availability of transport the need for the rest house became less urgent and in the early 1940s, it was converted into a maternity section of the hospital. In 1976, it became a permanent care unit for aged people. Within the community, the women who spent their last years in the Margaret Cecil building were from the same era as those who waited there for the birth of their children.¹³

There is very little documentation on the history of the Nurses Quarters and the Doctors Surgery until the late 1960s. The district was without a medical practitioner for some years, which moved the Shire Council to advertise the position to which Irish Doctors Sheridan and Lagan responded. The Shire Council arranged for Dr Rigby's old surgery to be available for their use, and they practiced from it until 1992.¹⁴

Although the need for a new hospital facility was identified in the 1960s, a new hospital was not completed until 1990. Additions to the old hospital, in 1975, marked the last capital investment in the buildings. When the health department vacated the place *Old Hospital Complex* was in poor condition. Much community debate followed regarding the future of the place, with developers eager to purchase the site. The 'Save the heart of Margaret River' group successfully lobbied to have the site vested with the shire for community purposes and, in 1992, the Margaret River Community Resource Centre Inc. leased the place and received grant funding for alterations.

The town of Margaret River is now the centre of a region known for tourism, viticulture, surfing, alternative lifestyles and logging. The continuation of the latter and the development pressures associated with the town's prominence has threatened the character of a 'town in the forest' which is a significant attraction for residents and tourists.¹⁵ With its bushland setting, *Old Hospital Complex* is a reminder of the pioneering timber history of Margaret River and a visual reminder of the importance of the bush in the development of the town.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The town of Margaret River is situated on the south bank of the Margaret River, 8 kilometres from the coast, and 272 kilometres south of Perth. The town is approached along Bussell Highway, which becomes the main street of the town before continuing to Augusta, 50 kilometres to the south. Before entering the town, the highway passes through the National Park reserve around the river. This jarrah, marri and karri forest forms the main entrance to town and is a significant feature of the view north from the town toward the river valley.

Old Hospital Complex site is located 200 metres west of the Bussell Highway, overlooking the town centre. It fronts onto Tunbridge Street (formerly

¹² Cresswell, p. 200.

¹³ 'History of the Margaret River Hospital'.

¹⁴ Cresswell, p. 291.

¹⁵ Shire of Augusta - Margaret River 'Margaret River Town Planning Scheme number 17' (Shire of A.-M. R., December 1990) - the scheme was modified to reflect the community's objection to the draft proposal to build a road through the bushland, which would have resulted in the loss of most of the trees.

Wallcliffe Road) which was the main arterial road to the coast until road systems were rationalised in 1987. Directly across Tunbridge Street from *Old Hospital Complex* is a private residence and a residence built for the police department, both of which are a similar vintage and style. One of the few remaining buildings from the old Karridale township is located nearby. This creates an historical streetscape immediately outside *Old Hospital Complex* on Tunbridge Street; however, considerable development has occurred nearby that does not reinforce this character.

There are seven single storey buildings within *Old Hospital Complex*. Three of the earlier buildings face Tunbridge Street and the other buildings are grouped in an informal manner behind. *Old Hospital Complex* comprises:

- the Hospital Building [1924], - a single storey weatherboard cottage costing £1,100
- the Doctor's Surgery and Residence [1925], - a four room cottage built for Dr Rigby
- *Margaret Cecil Rest House* [May 1929], - a single storey weatherboard cottage which cost £1,200 funded by the 'Margaret's of Britain'
- the Nurses' Quarters [December 1929]
- alterations [1930s] to the hospital building added an operating theatre and dining room wing
- the matron's residence [1930s] included additions to the nurses quarters
- several additions to the Hospital and *Margaret Cecil Rest House* occurred but no details are available, this includes the morgue, orderlies room and drying shed
- alterations [1951] added a children's ward to the main building
- alterations [1965] added toilet facilities to the main building
- the laundry building [early 1970s] is a red brick, flat roofed building that replaced an old laundry of which no details are available
- alterations [1975] to the hospital building added a birth suite and boiler room
- alterations [1975] to the Margaret Cecil building added ablutions and other facilities for permanent care of the aged
- alterations [1993] to all buildings occurred to facilitate community usage

The Hospital building (west), the Doctor's Surgery (centre) and Nurses' Quarters (east) were all built with a similar (7.5 - 9 metre) setback from Tunbridge Street, with the *Margaret Cecil Rest House*, laundry, drying shed and morgue all located behind (south) the hospital building.

The four main buildings (Hospital, Surgery, Nurses Quarters and *Margaret Cecil Rest House*) and the morgue are similar in style and construction to other buildings from the group settlement era which used local jarrah for framing, flooring, weatherboards and skirtings. Roofs are galvanised iron and internal wall linings are either plasterboard, masonite or cement sheeting with battens.

The drying shed (clothes and linen) is constructed using jarrah posts and roof framing with corrugated asbestos roof sheeting. The laundry was built in the 1970s and is constructed from concrete, red brick and flat metal roofing.

Covering the balance (approximately 50%) of the site and immediately behind (south) *Old Hospital Complex* is bushland which contains regrowth representative of the original vegetation on the site when the place was built. The bushland is mostly tall eucalyptus *Calophylla* (marri trees) which, being set on ground higher than the town centre, dominate the town's western skyline. This reinforces the character of 'a town in the forest'.¹⁵

The style of the buildings could best be described as 'Victorian-Federation Carpenter Bungalow'¹⁶ although the economy in construction of the original buildings and the naivety of the builders construction technique produced a vernacular that has either deleted or modified the usual features of this style. The resultant vernacular has become associated with the rural lifestyle and the Margaret River environment that is attracting many new residents to the region. Additions during the 1930s show more of the details usually associated with the style. Alterations during the 1970s diminished the style by introducing some shallow pitch roofed areas to the rear of the hospital and the Margaret Cecil buildings.

The Doctors Surgery is substantially in the style of a 'group house'. This style is now being reproduced within the Margaret River region (sometimes using different materials and built to a more comfortable standard) for both family and tourist accommodation.

The most recent alterations (1993) to the place included relocating the old Doctor's Surgery south of the Nurses' Quarters to create a lawned courtyard and a view of *Margaret Cecil Rest House* from Tunbridge Street. The new courtyard has promoted pedestrian access through the site to the bushland beyond and is a well used pedestrian shortcut to the town centre. There are plans by the Shire Council to build a new public library, infant health centre and aged persons activity centre on the south-east corner of the site, which will formalise the pedestrian facilities and preserve the bushland.

The **Hospital Building** (1924) was built 'one room wide' (4.8 m.) with front and back verandahs, the latter was enclosed to form the main circulation corridor from which access was gained to three wings built at right angles to the main axis. Alterations, in 1993, changed the orientation of prime access from passage to the verandah, with the addition of new french doors, some new verandahs and the opening up some areas to form a lobby-lounge. In doing so, the 'sterile hospital' atmosphere has been changed. Now office suites and meeting rooms are independently accessible with the remnants of the old hospital corridor forming a service corridor for tenants. Other work involved repairs to floors, walls, ceilings and the electrical installation, where necessary. Where old wall and ceiling linings remain, the nurse call and other hospital fittings remain, particularly the operating theatre light.

¹⁶ This style is referred to by Linton Hodsdon. Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) does not have a style called this - the closest is Victorian Carpenter Gothic or Federation Carpenter Gothic.

The **Doctor's Surgery** (1925) was a basic four room cottage which, when relocated from its Tunbridge Street frontage, was altered by removing one wall and adding a new window.

Margaret Cecil Rest House (1929) developed in a similar way to the Hospital building and comprised two large rooms, three smaller rooms and an enclosed back verandah giving access to ablution facilities. One wall was the only addition during the 1993 alterations.

The **Nurses' Quarters** (1929) consisted of five single bedrooms accessed off the back verandah, five single bedrooms, lounge room, kitchenette and ablutions accessed through an internal passage system, and a self contained matron's residence behind. Alterations, in 1993, created a 3 bedroom caretakers' residence, an artist in residence suite, a Red Cross second-hand clothing shop, and three offices opening onto the front verandah. A new verandah was built along the west wall, in alignment with the verandah of the relocated doctor's surgery, to create a streetscape that fronts onto the new lawned courtyard. An interesting feature of the former matron's residence is the specially made glass for the louvre windows.

Alterations to all the buildings, in 1993, were funded by a Lotteries Commission grant and community donations, with some of the work performed by youth training programmes under the supervision of Architect, Linton Hodsdon. Limited funding prevented alterations extending to restoration, resulting in a somewhat shabby external appearance, although the buildings are structurally sound and serviceable. The current lessee, the Margaret River Community Resource Centre, is responsible for managing the place with further work dependent upon income earned from tenants.

13.3 REFERENCES

'Log book of contributions to the Margaret Cecil Rest House appeal'- the book is held on display at the new Margaret River Hospital. (England, c. 1930).

'History of the Margaret River Hospital' (MRCRC, Margaret River, 1993).

Public Works Department of W. A., Architectural drawings of additions to the Margaret River Hospital. Incomplete sets 1951 - 1975.