



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

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery is a fine example of Victorian Rural Gothic, enhanced by timber work which highlights the major components of the building. (Criterion 1.1)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The cross section of markers evident in the cemetery demonstrates the different stratas of society that were present in the community and shows the important role *St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery* played as the only place of worship and burial in a small, isolated community. (Criterion 2.1)

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery has a close association with the Egerton-Warburton family, the original owners of the church and one of the earliest families to farm the area around the Hay River. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery is held in high regard by the local community as a place of burial. (Criterion 4.1)

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery contributes to the Mt. Barker Anglican community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery may be the only surviving example in Western Australia of a church originally built on private property by the landowner. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

12. 3 CONDITION

The building is in fair condition. The appearance of the church could be enhanced by general repair of wall cracks, repainting and re-roofing of the cloister. The cemetery is well maintained and the headstones are in sound condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The building and cemetery retain a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The building and cemetery retain a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery comprises a simple church building constructed between 1872-74, by George Egerton-Warburton, on his own property, to provide a place of worship and education for his family and surrounding neighbours; and a small cemetery located directly adjacent to the Chapel, set amidst trees and lawn.

In Albany in the late 1830s, Government Resident Sir Richard Spencer found it difficult to raise sheep on his property at 'Strawberry Hill Farm', due to the presence of poison weed. Therefore he sent out an exploratory party to investigate the land around the Hay River.¹ Finding the land suitable, Spencer sent a flock of sheep there in 1836. The success of this move led to the settlement of the area by several other enterprising people, including Spencer's son-in-law, George Egerton-Warburton.

Lieutenant George Egerton-Warburton had been posted to Albany, with a detachment of the 51st Regiment in 1840; however, upon his marriage in 1842, to Sir Richard Spencer's daughter Augusta, he decided to take up farming. He resigned his commission and in October 1842, purchased a block of 320 acres, being Location 20, five miles upstream from Hay Farm (Spencer's farm). Named *St. Werburghs* after an early English Saxon church, Location 20 became the nucleus of further property purchases and pastoral leases.²

By 1849, following the clearing and development of the land, the entire Egerton-Warburton family was established at *St. Werburghs*. Located approximately 50km from the nearest town, Albany, the family became virtually self sufficient.

The arrival of convicts in the Swan River Colony in 1850 provided a cheap source of labour, allowing much needed public works to be built. In addition, the arrival of an increasing number of free immigrants made possible the opening up of more land.

The rector for Albany, Archdeacon Wollaston, who travelled extensively in the southern regions of the colony, noted 'that from habitual neglect religion had sunk to a miserable low ebb in the colony', although he recognised the hardships endured by isolated settlers who made long tiring journeys in bullock carts to attend church.³

Although regular church services were held in *St. John's Church*, Albany (completed by 1848), it was difficult for the isolated Egerton-Warburton family to attend church because of the great distance.

In the 1850s, George Egerton-Warburton's brother, Roland Eylls Egerton-Warburton, resident in England, placed £500 at his brother's disposal for the

¹ Situated in the vicinity of the township now known as Mt. Barker.

² Glover, R., *Plantagenet 'Rich and Beautiful: A History of the Shire of Plantagenet*, Western Australia, (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979), pp. 17-18; Garden, D.S., *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827*, (Thomas Nelson (Australia) Limited, Melbourne, 1977), p. 74.

³ Cited in, Smoker, E., 'The History of Anglican Churches - St Werburgh's Church and All Saints Church in the Mount Barker District', (Graylands Teachers' College thesis, 1967), p. 11.

building and endowment of a church with a view to the spiritual and educational benefit of his Australian relatives.⁴

George Egerton-Warburton thought the best idea would be to build a school/chapel as he believed that, 'the religious welfare of the colony would be best catered for by educating the children.'⁵ What followed was a series of negotiations and discussions with Bishop Hale as to the logistics and feasibility of such a proposal. As it happened, things did not turn out as originally planned and George found a way of investing Roland's gift of £500 and undertook to build a chapel entirely at his own expense.

Egerton-Warburton based his design on a chapel built on private property in Queensland, but modified it suit his own purpose. He decided to allow room for a congregation of 50 people, with room for further expansion if required.

Construction of the chapel began in the early part of 1872, when the walls were built by Samuel Swift and the requisite timber was cut by sawyers, Jennings and Jones. In October of the same year David Brown, carpenter, began the woodwork to the design of George Egerton-Warburton. A small portion of the woodwork, viz the panelling of the nave and the choir stalls, together with the entrance doors, was completed by Thomas Rodgers. The plastering was done by Egerton-Warburton.⁶

In June 1874, Bishop Hale visited *St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery*. The chapel was finished internally, although it was entirely bare, without proper seats and having only makeshift fittings. Nevertheless, it was decided that the building should be consecrated. The ceremony took place on 21 June 1874, and on the same day the adjacent cemetery was also consecrated.⁷ On the 12 July 1874, the Revd. William Wardell-Johnson held a service in the chapel for the first time.

Over the next few years efforts were made to improve and beautify the church building and to obtain the necessary religious ornaments. For example, when new seats were put into *St. John's Church* at Albany the old seats were presented to *St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery*. It was during 1875, that the altar rails and cancelli were erected, the iron work being made by Egerton-Warburton.

In 1878, the vestry was built and the winter's storms having been found to tell severely upon the plastering of the outside walls, a cloister with dwarf wall was built at the expense of Egerton-Warburton. In 1880, the clerestory and bellcote were added to the vestry, again at the expense of Egerton-Warburton.⁸

Although not always attended by a large number of people, *St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery* was the only place of worship in the Mount Barker region until 1900.

⁴ Smoker, E., p. 14.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *A History of St Werburgh's Chapel*, (included in a centenary celebrations pamphlet, 13 October 1974).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

The cemetery has been used on a continuous, if irregular, basis since its consecration. The cemetery comprises a variety of headstone markers, from substantial stone markers with large crosses to simple wooden markers.

Today, the Parish Council of All Saints Anglican Church in Mt. Barker is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of *St. Werburghs Chapel and Cemetery*. The Chapel is used continuously as a church and a service is held on the fourth Sunday of every month, as well as marriages, baptisms and other special occasions as requested.⁹

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

St Werburghs Chapel is a domestic style, free standing building in a rural setting. The building is intimate in scale and built in Victorian Rural Gothic.¹⁰ A small adjoining graveyard was consecrated at the same time as the chapel in 1874.

The building is rectangular in plan, with a nave, 11m x 1.8m, and a polygonal apse. The building is constructed of "Devonshire Cab" (sic) (mud walling) - a combination of earth, loam, water and chopped straw, laid on crushed rock foundations built up to a height of 300 mm above ground level.¹¹ The building is covered with a high pitched hipped roof, originally covered with sheoak shingles, but now sheeted with corrugated iron.¹² An iron cross decorates the roof at the front apex and a finial decorates the rear apex.

A porch breaks the simplicity of the facade. Covered with a gabled roof, the entrance features an ornamentally carved barge board and a Tudor arched doorway with timber panelled doors.

The nave consists of six recessed Tudor arched windows, three either side, containing stained glass imported from England.¹³

The building has timber floors throughout. The floor of the porch and cloister, originally timber, are now covered in concrete.¹⁴

The interior timbers are sheoak and jarrah, including timber panelling to the nave and choir stalls.

In 1875, the altar rails and cancelli were erected. Made of gilded hand forged iron, the cancelli screen is designed in a vine leaf pattern and the rails are in a flower leaf pattern.

In 1878, a vestry was added, constructed with lower walls to those of the main chapel and covered with a gabled roof with its ridge abutting the wall of the main chapel. A Tudor arched window, awning and timber fringe features on the gable wall. At the same time, a cloister was added, to relieve damage on

⁹ Letter from Peter Salmon-Lomas, Rector - 24 August 1994.

¹⁰ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture, Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, (Angus & Robertson, 1989), p. 93., cites the term Rural Gothic can be applied to countrified styles of Victorian Rustic Gothic.

¹¹ *ibid.*, Smoker, p. 16. This reference should read cob not cab. Fleming (et.al.) *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* 4th Edition (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991) p. 100.

¹² Date of alteration unknown.

¹³ *ibid.*, Smoker, p. 16.

¹⁴ Date of alteration unknown.

the plastering of the exterior walls, caused by winter storms. The cloister is built on a dwarf wall and covered by a separate roof supported on square timber posts.

In 1880, a clerestory and bellcote were added to the vestry. The bellcote is decorated with a timber fringe. In 1978, Cyclone Alby demolished the bellcote; however, this has since been reinstated.

Minor modifications and repairs have been carried out on the building. In 1977, the roof gutters were replaced. Over the last three years, a new timber floor was laid in the Chapel and the vestry floor was tiled.

13.3 REFERENCES

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet.