



**HERITAGE  
COUNCIL**  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## **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)**

- 3.5.1 Grazing stock
- 3.8.9 Moving goods and people by air
- 3.13.1 Building to suit Australian conditions
- 3.16 Struggling with remoteness, hardship and failure
- 3.18.1 Raising capital
- 3.19 Marketing and retailing
- 4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities

#### **HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)**

- 205 Air transport
- 301 Grazing, pastoralism and dairying
- 310 Manufacturing and processing
- 505 Markets
- 507 Water, power, major transport routes
- 604 Innovators

#### **11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\***

The small scale *Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* contrasts with the vastness of the surrounding country. (Criterion 1.1)

The Glenroy Homestead Group is a good example of a group of simple 1950s vernacular style buildings, set in an open landscape with remnant mature garden plantings, which together form a Northwest pastoral group. (Criterion 1.3)

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from 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.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

## **11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE**

The Abattoir and Aerodrome were conceived and developed to overcome difficulties in marketing cattle from remote inland stations, as a response to the additional restrictions imposed by World War Two and the increasing availability of technology that allowed for the air transportation of chilled meat from a land-based abattoir, where previously stock had to be transported by hoof or by truck to meatworks associated with ports at Wyndham or Derby. (Criterion 2.1)

The Abattoir and Aerodrome had an important role in the development of the beef pastoral industry in the Kimberley and the North West during the twentieth century by changing the way that beef was exported from inland areas, successfully providing an important facility for surrounding pastoralists on a seasonal basis from 1949 to 1965, and contributing significantly to the quota of Australian meat exported to Britain. (Criterion 2.1)

The Abattoir, together with nearby operative cattle yards, tanks, and windmill, and the associated pastoral complex at Glenroy Homestead, illustrates the evolution of the pastoral industry by demonstrating the range of facilities required for its operation. (Criterion 2.2)

The Abattoir and Aerodrome were part of the Air Beef Scheme, which it was anticipated would produce a network of inland abattoirs throughout northern Australia, although this network did not eventuate. (Criterion 2.2)

Glenroy Homestead was built in 1949/50 as the family residence of Keith & Minna Blythe, members of the Pilbara pioneering Blythe family, whose contribution to the establishment of pastoral settlement in the West Kimberley was most notable in the construction of the Abattoir. (Criterion 2.3)

Construction of the Abattoir and Aerodrome was a considerable innovative achievement in difficult climatic and logistical conditions, where the materials, with the exception of raw materials such as sand and water, were transported by air to the site. (Criterion 2.4)

## **11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

The Abattoir and Aerodrome have the potential through archaeological material to provide information about the history of abattoirs and meat processing in Western Australia. (Criterion 3.1)

## **11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE**

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## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* was the only privately owned inland abattoir established in the Kimberley for the slaughter of livestock. (Criterion 5.1)

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* was the only Air Beef abattoir established in Western Australia, and probably in Australia as a whole. (Criterion 5.1)

## **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

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### **12.3 CONDITION**

The Abattoir has been dismantled, and a fire occurring during that process caused further loss of fabric. The remaining material, such as the footings, has not been disturbed. The only extant building is clad with sheets of fibrous cement that is likely to contain asbestos. This building is in poor condition and the sheet cladding is broken. One of the two runways from the former Aerodrome is maintained for use by the owner of the surrounding pastoral lease.

The Glenroy Homestead Group is in poor to good condition. The concrete block homestead is good condition. The fibro clad buildings are in fair to poor condition as is the stone building nearby. Sheds and out-buildings are in fair condition.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

With the exception of the single runway of the former Aerodrome, the Abattoir and Aerodrome are not currently used. The remnants of the Abattoir and the associated structures should remain a ruin and could be used for tourism and interpretive purposes. As such the place has moderate integrity. Any other use would reduce the integrity of the place. The Glenroy Homestead Group is not inhabited but provides some storage facilities and is periodically used by stockmen as a base camp.

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* has moderate authenticity, as only original fabric remains extant at the side of the Abattoir and Aerodrome. However most of the fabric of these elements has been removed. The Glenroy Homestead Group retains most of its original fabric and has had few major alterations. It has high authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Dr Cathie Clement, Historian and Rosemary Rosario, Architectural heritage consultant, in December 2004, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

The recommended curtilage does not include the adjacent operative cattle yards (1973), tanks, and windmill adjacent to the sites of the former Abattoir, Aerodrome, cattle yards, and ancillary buildings.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group*, including the former Aerodrome (1947) and former Abattoir (1949–1951), and the Glenroy Homestead Group (1949/50, c. 1951), located seven kilometres to the south-east of the ruins, is situated “over the range”<sup>1</sup> in the central Kimberley where, until the late nineteenth century, few Bunuba, Ngarinyin, Unggumi or Worla people saw a non-indigenous person.<sup>2</sup> The pastoral lease that comprises Glenroy Station surrounds the ruins.<sup>3</sup>

Glenroy Station was established by Arthur Blythe and Reginald Nash Spong in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> The Blythe family’s association with the West Kimberley dates from 1885 and includes involvement in both the pastoral industry and the liquor trade. Family members owned the Fitzroy River cattle station known as Brooking Creek, which provided a base from which to drive cattle over the range. Brooking Creek Station was also the departure point for the first bullock dray sent to Glenroy. The route selected became known as Blythe’s Track. The extent to which the colonists utilised paths made by Indigenous people went unremarked.

While Glenroy was being established, Arthur Blythe’s father Joseph established Mount House Station (to the north-west) and its outstation, Fairfield (closer to Derby). In that work, he drew on Frank Hann’s earlier exploration. He also benefited from Connor’s Track being blazed through the King Leopold Ranges from Windjana Gorge to Mt Caroline (north-east of Mt House).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term “over the range” applies to country north of the King Leopold Range. Ion L. Idriess, *Over the Range: Sunshine and Shadow in the Kimberleys*, Angus & Robertson Limited, Sydney, first edition 1937, reprint 1939, p. [V], describes that part of Australia as ‘one of the wildest areas left’.

<sup>2</sup> In this assessment, the identification of the indigenous inhabitants of that locality draws on Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, *Yirra: Land Law and Language – Strong and Alive*, the Centre (KALACC), Fitzroy Crossing (WA), 1996, p. 64 (map).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Land Information (DLI), Crown Lease 331/1967.

<sup>4</sup> *West Australian*, 24 July 1963, copy of article held by Derby Library; State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA), WAS 1311, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5869, Item 12, Lease Register and Index, 71 1 to 405 and 98 121 to 2254, 1887-1898, p. 84 (leases 458/98 and 459/98) and p. 98 (leases 586/98 and 587/98). It is noted that the preceding land tenure information, and most of the other information provided in this assessment, has been drawn from extracts recorded in the Kimberley Historical Sources Project (KHSP) files for Glenroy Station and the Air Beef Abattoir associated with that station.

<sup>5</sup> SROWA, AN 5/2, Police Department, Acc 430, 383/1907, Derby – Journal of Constable T P Napier (452) whilst on patrol 4.11.1906 to 28.11.1906; SROWA, DOLA, Cons 4567, 503 253, Cancelled Public Plan 134/300, No. 3, litho 17/4/1914, cancelled 17/12/17; W V Fitzgerald’s Diary of the Kimberley Trigonometrical Survey Expedition, April 5 to October 25 1905, pp. 9, 13, 14, 18 and 20, extracts in KHSP, 1905, electronic file; KHSP, biographical data for Michael O’Connor.

Further pastoral development occurred over the range and, by 1909, the stations accessed via Derby included Mount House, at a distance of 220 miles (352km), Isdell Downs (240 miles), and Mount Barnett (260 miles). The distance and isolation precluded a mail service, and the roughness of the intervening terrain made pack horses the only viable means for transporting goods. That situation changed in 1910 when W. H. (“Bullocky”) Johnson upgraded the track, enabling bullock teams to reach Isdell Downs.<sup>6</sup>

In the years that followed, Arthur Blythe and his brothers Joseph William and Mervyn Frederick jointly purchased Mount House, Fairfield, and E. G. Thurkle’s Point Torment Station. Another transaction saw Arthur Blythe’s share of Glenroy pass to Jabez Pearson Orchard.<sup>7</sup>

In 1916, when the “cattle king” Sid Kidman (later Sir Sidney Kidman) invested in Orchard and Spong’s station, the Glenroy leases went into the name of the Glenroy Pastoral Company. That transaction, the first of Kidman’s investments in the Kimberley, led to an expansion of Glenroy Station.<sup>8</sup>

In 1919, the Blythe brothers sold Mount House, Fairfield and Point Torment Stations to another Kidman company. In 1924, that company defaulted on its second payment, leaving the Blythes in the position of repossessing three stations that had few saleable or near-saleable cattle.<sup>9</sup>

The repossession brought with it the need to share the cost of maintaining Johnson’s Track, which still provided the only route by which wagons could reach Mount House and Isdell Downs. On top of that outlay, the cost of having goods carried from Derby was £20 a ton.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1920s, despite the impact of cattle tick and the 1924 drought, the outlook for Glenroy, Mount House, Fossil Downs, Gogo and Christmas Creek Stations improved. Meatworks had opened in Wyndham and were linked to the central Kimberley by a new stock route. The financial benefit was minimal however. Cattle had to be five years old to withstand the punishing walk to either Wyndham or Derby and, even then, they lost condition along the way.<sup>11</sup>

Little improvement occurred in the living conditions of the workers on inland stations. Illness, trauma and depression took their toll and the number of graves on the stations grew. On Glenroy, a 63-year old cook, Samuel O’Hara, died in 1923, and a 47-year old manager, William John (Billy) King,

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6 SROWA, AN 1/3, Aborigines and Fisheries Departments, Acc 652, 1010/1909, R.M. Derby : Issue of permits, p. c. [19]; G. C. Bolton, ‘A survey of the Kimberley Pastoral Industry from 1885 to the Present’, M.A. thesis, UWA, 1953, p. 148; additional information provided by Peter J Bridge.

7 Battye (ed.), *The History of the North West*, pp. 123–4; SROWA, WAS 1311, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5869, Item 12, p. 84 (leases 458/98 and 459/98), p. 94 (lease 548/98), and p. 98 (lease 586/98); Battye Library, PR9221, Lindsay Gordon Blythe, ‘Reminiscences of L. G. Blythe: Comprising early life on Kimberley stations, Airbeef and building of roads’, typescript, Perth, [1977], p. 14.

8 SROWA, WAS 1311, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5869, Item 12, pp. 84 and 98; Bolton, ‘A survey’, p. 182; Jill Bowen, *Kidman: The Forgotten King: The true story of the greatest pastoral landholder in modern history*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1987, reprint 1991, p. 243; DLI, Crown Lease 1094/1924.

9 Bolton, ‘A survey’, p. 182; Bowen, *Kidman*, p. 245; Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 14–16.

10 Bolton, ‘A survey’, p. 243.

11 *ibid.*, pp. 219–20; Battye Library, PR9221, p. 14; Inspector W W Henwood, ‘West Kimberley District General Report’, submitted to the Surveyor General, Department of Lands and Surveys, Perth, 26 November 1950, copy donated to KHSP by David Henwood.

died in 1924. O'Hara was buried on the run; King near the present homestead site.<sup>12</sup>

In 1927, a landslide blocked Johnson's Track. Kidman and his associates then abandoned Isdell Downs, shifting their cattle and plant from that station to Glenroy. Tom Fitzpatrick was the Glenroy manager at the time but, by 1930, he was the occupant of a grave next to Billy King.<sup>13</sup>

Sid Kidman pulled livestock off Glenroy in 1930/1931, taking 3000 head of cattle from that station and Fossil Downs. He and his associates then abandoned Glenroy.<sup>14</sup>

The Blythes were still struggling to make something of the adjacent Mount House Station. Young Douglas Blythe (son of Joseph, jnr) went to work on Mount House and, among other things, became responsible for droving cattle to Derby. His uncle Arthur took other mobs to Wyndham.<sup>15</sup> A later account of that activity read:

Droving to both points was very hazardous. The track for the whole way was stony and through poor feeding country. Derby was 250 miles away and Wyndham 350. The Derby trip took about 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> weeks and Wyndham 6 weeks. Over the hills the cattle had to be strung out in single file for as much as 2 miles over the various ranges and each year the drovers had to clear these tracks of loose stones. Only a first-class drover could handle the job, as the bullocks could be lamed by pushing them along too fast.<sup>16</sup>

With Mount House under mortgage, Douglas Blythe's brother Gordon was fearful of the family losing that property. So, in 1934, he offset the risk by securing a lease over all but the most southern part of the Glenroy land abandoned by Kidman and his associates.<sup>17</sup> Gordon Blythe had no money to develop Glenroy but his brother helped him to stock the lease.<sup>18</sup> That situation prevailed during the Second World War, with Douglas remaining on Mount House while Gordon served in the army. The war caused the closure of the Wyndham meatworks and a reduction of shipping out of Derby, thus cutting off most of the markets for the Blythes' cattle. That crisis no doubt contributed to the older Blythes selling Mount House to the next generation (Gordon, Douglas and Keith Blythe).<sup>19</sup>

In 1944, because motorised trucks could not reach Mount House, Douglas Blythe arranged for MacRobertson Miller Aviation Company Ltd (MMA) to fly

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<sup>12</sup> Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 13–14; Yvonne & Kevin Coate, *More Lonely Graves of Western Australia*, Hesperian Press, Perth, 2000, pp. 209 and 296.

<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission, 1928, Question 1202, cited by Bolton, 'A survey', p. 243; SROWA, AN 5/3, Police Department, Acc 430, 1901/1927, Fitzroy Crossing Police Station, Patrol Journals, Vol. 5, journal commencing 26 July 1927; Coate, *More Lonely Graves*, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> SROWA, AN 5/3, Police Department, Acc 430, 9640/1930, Annual Report for year ending 30–6–31; Bolton, 'A survey', p. 243; SROWA, WAS 1311, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5869, Item 12, Lease Register and Index, 71 1 to 405 and 98 121 to 2254, 1887-1898, p. 187 (lease 1294/98).

<sup>15</sup> Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 23–4 and 27–9; SROWA, WAS 2256, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5870, Item 65, Lease Register, 98/201–218 and 396/400–[872], 1933-1964, p. 3 (lease 98/216) and p. 7 (lease 396/423).

<sup>16</sup> Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 29–30.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 34–5; SROWA, WAS 2256, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 5870, Item 65, Lease Register, 98/201–218 and 396/400–[872], 1933-1964, p. 3 (lease 98/216) and p. 7 (lease 396/423).

<sup>18</sup> SROWA, AN 3/6, Lands, Acc 541, 2522/36, Blythe Bros (Mt House) Appln for relief under Land Act Amendt Act 1936, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 37–9.

stores and station necessities to the station. At that time, Gordon Blythe was in Bougainville and, surrounded by aeroplanes that were being used for freight, he began to ponder how air transport might solve the problem of marketing the Mount House cattle. 'Surely', he thought, 'we could build an abattoir on the property and transport our beef out to a seaboard freezing works for onward marketing delivery.' Douglas Blythe, fearful that the three brothers would not cope with such an enormous undertaking, ignored the letter that conveyed those thoughts.<sup>20</sup>

Sir William Angliss, 'the most experienced and successful meatworks operator in the whole of Australia' advised Gordon Blythe against proceeding. Blythe nonetheless convinced MMA to embark on a trial and, in May 1947, his brother organised the slaughter of four choice young bullocks beside the Mount House airstrip. The carcasses hung from sundown until 2 a.m. and were then flown south, reaching Perth in good condition at 3 p.m. that day. With that success, the scope for using air transport to export beef from the central Kimberley began to look feasible.<sup>21</sup>

In planning their venture, the Blythes were mindful that, while Mount House stood to benefit the most, they did not want an abattoir near the homestead. Nor did they want the associated 4000 to 5000 head of cattle ruining the soft Mount House river frontage. They therefore decided to position the facility 40 miles (64km) away on a part of the Glenroy lease. Douglas Blythe promptly selected a site for an aerodrome and, in 1947, Percy Barwise, the airport inspector, saw to the construction of an airstrip 6000 feet (1829m) one way and 4600 feet (1402m) the other. He was on a tour of inspection at the time, looking at 30 Kimberley aerodromes constructed to provide access for the Flying Doctor. Where possible, the graded airstrips were capable of landing a D.C.3.<sup>22</sup>

The Western Australian Government, through its North West Development and Advisory Committee, assisted the Blythes. The committee chairman, Russell Dumas, arranged for Alan Milton, a Public Works Department draftsman, to prepare a preliminary design for the meatworks and an estimate of costs. The estimate, double what the Blythes had envisaged, prompted design modifications. Savings were made on the ancillary buildings after union officials accepted that the project was experimental and approved structures that would have been considered substandard elsewhere. The workers' buildings were to comprise 'an open shed with partitions between the beds, antbed floors with concrete edges and ex-Army Nissen huts for stores, office and administration quarters'. The ablution sheds were to be open to the sky.<sup>23</sup>

Even with those savings, the Blythes owed their further progress to a combination of generosity and coincidence. Alan Milton used his knowledge and contacts to explore options for chilling. John Stoneman, a retired Perth builder who flew his own aircraft, offered his time and expertise to build the

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20 *ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

21 *ibid.*, pp. 40–5; Bolton, 'A survey', p. 317.

22 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 46–7; *Northern Times*, 10 October 1947, 'Kimberley Trails', copy held by Peter J. Bridge.

23 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 45 and 49–51.

Abattoir. Australian National Airways (ANA), which was looking to start a similar venture elsewhere, agreed to put capital towards the Blythes' venture instead. And, with the entry of that company, MMA agreed to become involved. The construction phase of the Air Beef venture thus began with the two aviation companies and the Blythes each putting up a quarter of the capital while the Western Australian Government provided a loan for the balance.<sup>24</sup>

Construction began in January 1949. Keith Blythe resigned from his Perth employment so that he could help with the work and build a homestead on Glenroy. With the exception of some raw materials, everything had to be sent by air. The loads included prefabricated steel work and 26 tons (26.4 tonnes) of bagged cement. The local materials included timber for the cattle yards and race, which were built by Jim Kelly, an old Kimberley identity. Water was obtained by boring, and Keith Blythe carted sand 24 kilometres from the Hann River in a 3-ton truck. He also carted shale, which was raked up by Aboriginal workers, so that it could be used to improve the sand. The Aboriginal workers came from Mount House to supplement John Stoneman's building team (a foreman rigger, an apprentice carpenter, a cook, the Blythe brothers, and a couple of labourers). A large part of their work involved the production of 18,000 hollow concrete blocks.<sup>25</sup>

In the heat and humidity of the Wet season, concrete cured slowly. John Stoneman concreted the engine and compressor blocks six weeks before the engineering contractors installed the motors and refrigeration. The 18,000 concrete blocks went into waist high walls and other structures, mostly before curing, because the Abattoir had to be operative by May. The rush to finish also meant that the meatworkers, led by Jack Silvester, participated in the construction work by fixing the insulation on the ceilings and walls. That material 'was in slabs of 4 ft. x 2 ft. x 2 inches and had to be stuck on with hot bitumen'. The floor insulation went in as part of the laying of the floors. The meatworkers also 'carted antbed and made the men's quarters floors and built the store'.<sup>26</sup>

The Abattoir, built so hurriedly and with no precedent, exhibited shortcomings from the outset. The initial lack of a loading gantry, for example, meant that the chilled quarters of beef had to be carried on to the aircraft. Yet, in the first season (from 11 May to 1 September 1949), 1805 head of cattle belonging to the Blythes and their neighbours were killed and processed. The meat was then flown from the Air Beef Abattoir to the Wyndham Meatworks for freezing and export to the United Kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

The endless bureaucratic negotiations and approvals necessary for the joint venture are beyond the scope of this documentary evidence. It is sufficient to note that health and export standards had to be met, and security had to be provided for the various capital investments. Also relevant is that, although the Abattoir was sometimes called the Glenroy Meatworks, it actually

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24      ibid., pp. 52–5.

25      ibid., pp. 55–63; Warwick Edwards, *Last of the Packhorse Stockmen*, privately published, Rockhampton (Qld), 2003, Book 1, pp. 177–8.

26      Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 63 and 68–9.

27      ibid., pp. 69–70 and 75–85.



occupied land that Gordon Blythe surrendered to the Crown, from the Glenroy lease, in 1949.<sup>28</sup>

In 1950 and 1951, George Bond supervised the alteration of the Abattoir. That phase of work included 'the building of a small boning room and a refrigerated assembly and holding room for beef quarters in front of the chillers'. In other works, the office, store, and administration quarters, were enlarged and the airmen's tents were replaced with aluminium Nissen huts. The cattle yards, which were located approximately 70 metres south-east of the slaughter floor, were rebuilt to reduce the extensive bruising suffered by the man-shy cattle. In all, those yards had to be rebuilt three times.<sup>29</sup>

The lack of road access to Mount House and Glenroy meant that all supplies, including generator plant fuel, had to be flown to the Air Beef Abattoir. The cost of air-freighting heavy duty steel drums, which then remained on site, prompted an innovative solution. Vacuum Oil Co. Pty Ltd produced a 455-kilolitre neoprene bag in which diesel was transported by air for underground storage.<sup>30</sup>

Gordon Blythe and Ian Grabowsky, ANA's Planning and Development Manager, envisaged a network of Air Beef abattoirs but the Glenroy facility remained the only such entity in Western Australia. Plans to build a similar facility at Fitzroy Crossing were shelved in 1953. Roads and bridges were being improved and, in anticipation of port access becoming available via a Commonwealth-funded Beef Road, the Blythes joined others to establish the Derby Meat Processing Company (DEMCO). In 1959, Derby replaced Wyndham as the destination for Air Beef Abattoir flights and, in 1963, refrigerated trucks began carrying chilled beef down the new Derby–Gibb River Road. The Air Beef Abattoir had almost reached the end of its usefulness but, although falling short of new criteria for export to the United States, it remained functional until 1965. Then, with DEMCO ready to take on the slaughtering and processing, the Air Beef Abattoir was dismantled. It had operated successfully on a seasonal basis from 1949 to 1965, overcoming obstacles in a timely and innovative way and contributing to the quota of Australian meat exported to Britain.<sup>31</sup>

Of the cattle stations that sent livestock to the Air Beef Abattoir, Glenroy had the strongest association with it. Apart from the abattoir site having come from the Glenroy lease, Keith Blythe built the Glenroy homestead in 1949/50 and a nearby pig farm that comprised yards, shelters and electrified fences. The pigs were slaughtered at the Abattoir to produce first quality baconers,

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28 National Archives of Australia (NAA): Department of Commerce and Agriculture, State Branch, Western Australia; PP591/1, Correspondence files, annual single number series with "E" prefix; E1974/2486, Meat - registered establishment Air Beef Pty Ltd, Glenroy - number 215, 1948 - 1966; DLI, Crown Lease 71/1935.

29 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 68 and 92–3; Richard Blythe, formerly of Glenroy Station, conversation with Cathie Clement, 6 November 2004. Numerous articles describe the operations of the Air Beef Abattoir. See, for example, Jack Benari, 'Abattoir in a Roadless Waste: A Unique Work Experience' in *Papers in Labour History*, No. 17, December 1996, pp. 82–97.

30 Frank Colquhoun, *Cockpit and Spanner: My Recollections of Early Aviation in Western Australia*, The Maylands Historical Society Incorporated, Maylands (WA), 2001, p. 149.

31 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 118–21; Bolton, 'A survey', pp. 317–21; *West Australian*, 14 May 1963, p. 8, 'Road Takes Over From Beef Airlift'; *West Australian*, 23 September 1963, p. 6, letter from K. A. Ridge; NAA: PP591/1; E1974/2486, p. 112.

which, like the beef, were frozen and shipped to Britain.<sup>32</sup> Another poignant link exists through Arthur William (Bill) Connell, a drover who died whilst taking bullocks to the meatworks in September 1964, being buried next to Billy King and Thomas Fitzpatrick.<sup>33</sup>

Keith Blythe occupied the Glenroy homestead with his wife Minna and their children.<sup>34</sup> The other buildings in the homestead group include the men's quarters (c. 1951). A Derby carpenter, K. C. ("Snowy") Cann, erected that building using local stone, lime burnt on site, and timber cut from Hann River eucalypts.<sup>35</sup>

The expenditure of money on the Glenroy Homestead Group, like many other such places, came second to expenditure on fencing and other station needs. The homestead required a new roof and ceilings by 1964 but almost a decade seems to have passed before major work was done there. The breakdown of the expenditure on improvements in the year ending 30 June 1973 identified dams (\$10,017), a drafting yard (\$19,905), additions to the homestead (\$4857), and plant, furnishings etc (\$1309).<sup>36</sup>

That approach to expenditure has obviously continued because, today, while Glenroy is worked in conjunction with Mount House, the Glenroy Homestead Group is falling into disrepair while the cattle yards (c1973), tanks and windmill constructed beside the abattoir are in good condition. The ground containing the ruins is not used but, being situated beside a public road, it is accessible to visitors.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* comprises the former Aerodrome (1947) and former Abattoir (1949–1951), and the Glenroy Homestead Group (1949/50, c. 1951), located seven kilometres to the south-east of the ruins.

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* is located approximately 65kms south west of Mount House Station Homestead, east of the Leopold Range in the West Kimberley. Access to the site is from Mornington Road, which runs south from the Gibb River Road, from a point approximately 313kms east of Derby. Mornington Road is an unsealed 4-wheel drive track used to access the Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary, owned by Australian Wildlife Conservancy, a non-profit organization that protects Australian wildlife. From Mornington, visitors have access to remote gorges of the upper Fitzroy River. Mornington Road also provides road access to Mount House Station and Mornington Station.

Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins), comprising the site of the former Abattoir, meat processing plant, associated structures and Aerodrome, is

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32 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 59, 80, 93, 95 and 99.

33 Coate, *More Lonely Graves*, p. 79.

34 Battye Library, PR9221, pp. 64 and 72.

35 Richard Blythe, formerly of Glenroy Station, conversation with Cathie Clement, 6 November 2004; *Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, Electoral Roll, Kimberley Electoral District (Amalgamated), 30 June, 1952*, p. 3; Battye Library, OH205, interview with Douglas H. Blythe, 28 March 1977, p. 7.

36 SROWA, AN 3/20, Lands, Acc 1764, 3257/64, Vol. 1, Leases, Pastoral Lease, Glenroy Stn Kimberley Division, O [sic] K Gordon Pty Ltd, pp. 79, 81, 90, 120, 133, and 146.

located on the western side of the Mornington Road approximately 70km south of the Derby–Gibb River Road turn-off. The cattle yards (1973), fencing, water tanks, and windmill on the north western edge of the Abattoir ruins are recent and not associated with the ruins. Those structures do, however, provide a convenient landmark by which to locate the ruins.

From the site of the ruins, Mornington Road has been re-aligned to deviate around the Glenroy Homestead Group. The homestead and outbuildings, including the stone men's quarters and a site containing at least three graves, are located on the former road alignment 7kms to the south-east of Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins).

The site of Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) contains one extant building, footings and remnants of other buildings and Aerodrome remnants that include one useable airstrip and its markers. Adjacent to the site are cattle yards (1973) used for drafting, water tanks and a windmill, all part of the infrastructure of the surrounding station.

The only extant building on the site is located a few metres from the road, the exact location identified by GPS as 8083805N by 52 189323E. This is a steel framed, corrugated fibrous cement sheet clad, shed with a skillion roof. The building is constructed on a concrete floor slab and measures approximately 3m x 8.7m by 3.1m in height. The building is in very poor condition with broken fibrous cement sheets. The cladding is likely to contain asbestos products.

The area to the immediate north-west of the shed contains at least five concrete floor slabs that indicate the location of former structures, no longer extant. Approximately 11.3m west of the building is a slab measuring approximately 3.5m x 10.5m. Approximately 5m further north and 9m west is a slab measuring approximately 5m x 14m. Approximately 10m north is a large slab measuring approximately 8m x 25.5m, and to the east of that, and approximately in line with the existing shed, is a slab measuring 11m x 5m. The GPS reading for this location is 8083834N by 52 189368E. Approximately 12m to the west and 8m north is a slab measuring 2m x 5m. These measurements are approximate as the concrete slabs are fairly uneven. The slabs are made with local stone as aggregate and in some cases retain stirrups and other metal fixings for structural framing and cladding no longer extant. A number of the slabs are cracked or broken with some sections of concrete completely disintegrated.

Beyond this group of concrete slabs and further to the west by approximately 54m, is another group of remnant structures. The main element is a concrete and stone ramp oriented north-south and measuring 1.5m in height by 3.2m in width and 4.5m in length. At the base of the ramp the concrete continues as a slipway measuring approximately 17m in length x 1m in width. To the west of the ramp there are several more concrete slabs of various sizes. A slab measuring approximately 5m x 8m is located immediately west. Approximately 5m further on is a slab measuring 12m x 6m with a truncated corner with two steel rails 1.25m apart set into the concrete and facing north-west. This slab has a concrete lined depression, or slot, measuring approximately 2m by 700mm in the centre. The GPS at this location is 8083916N by 52 189316E.

The areas around and between these groups of concrete slabs, or former structures, contain steel remnants including hooks, star pickets, bolts and other miscellaneous items that suggest the existence of former buildings and machinery from the former Abattoir.

Based on the documentary evidence available, the concrete slabs probably represent the Abattoir and facilities for processing, packing and chilling the meat. Some slabs may also relate to former staff accommodation and administration buildings, the exact location of which is not clear.

Further west, approximately 350m from the various structural remnants, are the cattle yards (1973) used for drafting purposes. The yards are constructed of 120mm diameter, 1.7m high steel posts with wire fencing, steel gates, concrete ramps and various feed troughs etc. The approximate location of the yards is GPS 8084189N by 52 189186E. Documentary evidence suggests that these yards are much more substantial than those that formed part of the former Abattoir, and that the Abattoir yards were located on the south-eastern side of the site.

To the north-east of the cattle yards are two water tanks and a windmill. One is a recent insulated water tank and the other, approximately 80m further north, is a bolted steel tank approximately 20m diameter and 2.3m high on concrete base. There is a steel framed windmill adjacent. The GPS for this location is 8084239N by 52 189291E. There are fences to the west and north of this area. These elements are all believed to be of more recent origin but there are number of steel items and other remnants on the ground in this area that may suggest links with the former Abattoir and Aerodrome. Further work including archaeological investigation would be needed to determine whether this is the case.

In the area to the south and east of the Abattoir (ruins) site are a number of remnants of the former Aerodrome. These include metal drums with the signs 'AVGAS' on them, white painted tyres and a steel post that probably originally held a wind sock. To the south, and approximately parallel to the current Mornington Road, one axis of the former Aerodrome's intersecting runways is maintained for use by the owner of Glenroy and Mount House Stations.

The physical evidence indicates that the majority of buildings and machinery associated with Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) has been removed. The site is otherwise relatively undisturbed and no new structures have been constructed. There is likely to be material below ground that would reveal additional information on the history of the place through archaeological investigation.

The Glenroy Homestead, constructed at approximately the same time as the meatworks, is located approximately seven kilometres to the south-east of the Abattoir (ruins). The GPS for the homestead is 8078539N by 52 192794E. The homestead site comprises a concrete block homestead (1949/1950) within a fenced compound that includes a domestic garden to the front and side of the homestead and various ancillary buildings to the rear. The homestead is oriented approximately north with a station yard to the western side with various station buildings and a stockyard. On the eastern side, approximately 200m away is a second residential building constructed of

stone, as the men's quarters, probably circa 1951. To the north of this is a group of three graves. The GPS for the graves is 8078500N by 52 192964E.

The Glenroy Homestead is constructed of 120mm thick concrete block walls painted white. The homestead is rectangular in plan with a concrete floored verandah on all sides and measures approximately 12.5m x 18m overall. The hipped corrugated iron roof extends with a broken pitch over the verandah and is supported on 100mm x 100mm timber posts painted blue. There are no gutters or downpipes. There are two concrete steps up to the verandah from the front path. The homestead is symmetrical with two timber-framed windows on each side of the front door. The windows adjacent to the front door are glass louvres. The front door opens into a central living area that runs the width of the house and has a fireplace on one side. There are two rooms on each side of this space. One of the back rooms has tiles to one wall, indicating a former kitchen or bathroom. All the windows to the back elevation are glass louvres. Internally the homestead floor is a painted concrete slab, walls are painted cement render and the ceiling is fibrous cement.

There are three ancillary structures linked to the back verandah of the homestead. These are constructed of steel frame with fibrous cement cladding and are in poor condition with extensive areas of broken sheeting. On the western side is a large structure approximately 14m x 4m linked by a 2m long covered way to the back of the homestead. This building includes a large commercial kitchen. On the western side is a fibrous cement clad building that measures approximately 6m x 6.5m and contains former sleeping accommodation. Adjacent to the eastern side of the homestead is a former toilet block that is in very poor condition with broken wall cladding. The kitchen block is in fair condition and the bedroom block in poor condition.

There is a fenced enclosure around the homestead. Behind the main building is a courtyard, grassed area and mature fruit trees. On the other three sides there is evidence of former domestic landscape treatments with flowering trees and shrubs. There is a slate path from the front door to a gate in front of the homestead and a rotary washing line on the western side. On the back corner of the site is an army Nissen hut formerly used as a kitchen and later used for storage purposes. The hut opens onto the station yard on the western side of the homestead. There are several other station sheds in this area and a stockyard.

The original road is located to the east of the homestead. On the opposite side of the road is a small corrugated iron clad hut approximately 2m x 3m. There are several more buildings at the back of the homestead behind the back fence. These include a metal clad open pavilion like structure in very poor condition that appears to have been used for recreational purposes.

Approximately 200m from the homestead compound a second dwelling has been constructed on the side of the hill. This building, constructed as men's quarters circa 1951 by K. C. ("Snowy") Cann, a Derby carpenter, comprises four rooms under a main roof with a verandah and separate kitchen and bathroom blocks attached to the sides. The building is roughly constructed of rock-faced ashlar with cement joints with a low pitched hipped roof that is partially collapsed. The four main rooms are of equal size, each having a door and timber framed window opening onto the verandah. The total

structure measures approximately 11m square with the kitchen structure approximately 3m x 2.5m and bathroom approximately 3m x 4.7m. There is a wire fence around the stone building and, outside the fence, on the north western side, are three graves.

The Glenroy Homestead Group is not inhabited but provides some storage facilities. Some of the buildings are maintained by the owner of the Mount House and Glenroy leases, and stockmen periodically use the place as a base camp. The concrete block homestead is good condition. The fibro clad buildings are in fair to poor condition as is the stone building nearby. Sheds and out-buildings are in fair condition.

### **13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION**

Information available from the Heritage Council of Western Australia Database and the Kimberley Historical Sources Project shows that, while other abattoirs existed in Western Australia, those places cannot be considered to be comparative places of similar function or purpose. The other places include Wyndham Freezing Canning & Export Works (HCWA Database, Place No. 09597) and Broome Meatworks Site (HCWA Database Place, No. 04852). Both were port-based facilities that relied on animals being delivered from stations either on the hoof or, in later years, by truck.

Wyndham Freezing Canning & Export Works was operative when the Air Beef Abattoir opened and closed, and its existence made the operation of the Air Beef Abattoir feasible. More important, however, is that the Air Beef Abattoir came into being as an innovative response to the economic losses that were associated with droving cattle from central Kimberley stations either to Wyndham for slaughter or to Derby for export.

Information available from the Australian Heritage Database shows that remote meatworks established elsewhere in Australia had more in common with the port-based facilities in the Kimberley than with the Air Beef Abattoir. Examples of other registered places include Vestey's Water Tank (former) in the Northern Territory (No. 15140), and Newport Meatworks Site (former) in Queensland (No. 101594).

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* is unique because it contains the remnants of an inland abattoir from which chilled meat was flown to port-based meatworks for freezing and export.

*Air Beef Abattoir and Aerodrome (ruins) and Glenroy Homestead Group* was the only Air Beef abattoir established in Western Australia, and probably in Australia as a whole.

### **13.4 KEY REFERENCES**

Battye Library, PR9221, Lindsay Gordon Blythe, 'Reminiscences of L. G. Blythe: Comprising early life on Kimberley stations, Airbeef and building of roads', typescript, Perth, [1977].

Bolton, G. C. 'A survey of the Kimberley Pastoral Industry from 1885 to the Present', M.A. thesis, UWA, 1953.

Kimberley Historical Sources Project, Glenroy, electronic file, and Glenroy~Air Beef, electronic file.

### **13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

National Archives of Australia hold approximately 100 files on the Air Beef Project. Most of those files are held in the Canberra office, and most have yet to be opened to researchers. Examination of those files would show whether the Air Beef Abattoir established by the Blythe brothers and others was unique in the Australian as well as in the Western Australian context.

If research were to be undertaken into meatworks established in the Northern Territory during World War Two, that research might reveal some parallels with the Air Beef operations. It is noted, however, that no parallels appear to exist with Cullen Compound Site in the Northern Territory (Australian Heritage Database, No. 16329).

For comparative purposes, and because all Western Australian pastoral leases are due to expire in 2015, it is essential to record the age and type of all notable structures on pastoral leases and former pastoral leases. At present, the lack of readily available information about those structures stands in the way of comparative information being provided in relevant heritage assessments. It also leaves at risk structures of heritage significance, which, through being either little known or difficult to access, or both, have not been included on municipal inventories.