



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

Walebing homestead and farm buildings are simply detailed. The roof forms (basic hips, gables and skillions at varying pitch), and wall structure combine to form buildings which are attractive. However, the community generally has little opportunity to view these buildings as they are not visible from the highway. (Criterion 1.1)

Walebing is extremely important in its entirety, as a precinct which has a singular character created by its individual components. Collectively, they form a very significant cultural environment. (Criterion 1.4)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Walebing illustrates the European settlement and development of the locality. Difficult conditions, with a restricted availability of labour and materials led to slow progress. Initially, farming was not greatly more financially rewarding than subsistence level, with slow capital accumulation. The fact that the majority of the buildings were constructed with the aid of convict labour is in itself important. Acceleration of development of the whole colony of Western Australia came with the availability of convicts in 1850. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

Walebing has significance for its close association with significant persons. Anthony O'Grady Lefroy (1816-1897) held numerous positions of importance in the government of Western Australia, including Colonial Treasurer. Sir Henry Bruce Lefroy, eldest son of Anthony O'Grady, gave community and State service and became the Premier of Western Australia in 1917. The Lefroy links to the region and their association with New Norcia are important and significant. (Criterion 2.3)

Walebing has importance as an example of achievement in a particular period. The construction of the buildings in the 1850s appears to have been quite an achievement for that period. The resources (finance, manpower, construction materials) were not readily available or obtainable. The main homestead is perhaps less of an achievement (though still a major undertaking) because the property was more established at that time. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The cultural history of Western Australia has an important reference site at *Walebing*. Written, drawn and photographic records can to some extent pass on the details to future generations, but the importance of the buildings in their context on the site is not reproducible. (Criteria 3.1, 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Walebing is important to the local rural community for largely social reasons because of the long-standing use and occupation by the Lefroy family and their various family branches in the area. The present Lefroys are descendants of the original settlers. (Criterion 4.1)

Walebing and other pioneering stations contribute strongly to their various local community's sense of place as they were the first points of European settlement and thus the initial focus of development. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1 RARITY

Walebing is significant for its rarity. There is unlikely to be found in Western Australia the same combination of various uses of buildings grouped together in a homogenous and well-preserved entity. (Criterion 5.1)

Walebing represents a way of life that is in danger of being lost. The concept of a self-contained rural community such as *Walebing* with proprietors, staff and livestock accommodated in a singular area, geared to run to serve its own needs, is a function no longer truly evident in the State. Buildings no longer required to be used on the property (i.e., staff quarters) are the most deteriorated and will eventually disappear without conservation measures being applied. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Walebing has all the attributes which identify it as being characteristic of its class as a rural station. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

Walebing is in good physical condition. Given that the buildings are relatively rigid structures, with floorings on a relatively elastic foundation material, it is fortuitous that further deterioration than which exists has not occurred. Generally this is because the buildings have been in continuous use, and thus have been maintained. The building 'D's collapse, and the imminent collapse of a portion of building 'C', are due to the fact that they are no longer in use. Overall, the buildings are in good condition in relation to each of the values for which *Walebing* has been assessed.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The long term viability or sustain ability of the values identified is quite clearly possible. *Walebing* continues to be used for the purposes for which it was originally established. *Walebing* has a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Walebing is generally all in an original state. The decay of building 'D' (former bulk store and living quarters of *Walebing* employees) has occurred in such a way that restoration (by reassembling the wall components) and reconstruction (with new roofing timber and iron following the example of the remaining portion) of the building is possible. Despite its collapse, this building has authentic features still intact, including hand-forged hardware to doors and windows. As a whole, *Walebing* has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The information for the documentary and physical evidence sections, as well as the criteria, is taken from a report by John Taylor, Architect, dated August 1992. Mr Taylor was commissioned by the Heritage Council of Western Australia to produce a report on the Cultural Heritage Significance of 'Walebing' homesteads and associated farm buildings.

Walebing was named after the original station of that name on the property. The property was initially established in the late 1840s by the transfer of Anthony O'Grady Lefroy's and Gerald de Courcy Lefroy's sheep holdings from a base at "Victoria Downs" near Bolgart.³² The Lefroys appear to have gradually worked their way north from their initial location - gathering and familiarisation at "Tipperary" near York in 1842, and Springhill near Northam in 1844. Anthony O'Grady Lefroy leased "Victoria Downs" at Bolgart in late 1846, and Gerald de Courcy Lefroy secured the rights to the land at *Walebing* on 8 December 1846. It appears that for the next few years they gradually established the property.

By mid-May 1848, it had been arranged by the Lefroys that a Mr Beer should take over the lease hitherto held by them at Bolgart, and that all the sheep would be placed on the *Walebing* property. They transferred themselves and their remaining sheep to *Walebing*, and very shortly work was begun on the first small house there. Gerald de Courcy, when he was not away, and until the house was finished, lived in what he called a "mia". This was, in mid 1848, a hut made from stone and earth, with a rush roof. It remained in existence until 1892, when most of it was destroyed by fire.

The landholding of *Walebing* was increased in August 1851 to 80,000 acres and by that time the house de Courcy had started to build the previous November was nearing completion, despite disasters such as 'thirty feet of wall fell down, flat as a pancake'. The outside walls had stone foundations, but rammed earth formed the supports of the interior ones. The floor was of ants' nest, lime, and sand in equal proportions. The rooms were in size: 20 x 17 feet, 14 x 17, 10 x 17, and 8 x 17 feet. Gerald de Courcy was assisted in the work by a man named Pike, who agreed to erect the stonework at threepence a yard, and be paid five shillings a day for laying the bricks. Mud bricks and pug mortar were used.

This house was burnt down, along with the "mia" as already mentioned, in 1892. However, the house was rebuilt using the same walls and foundations.

³² Cranfield, R. E. *From Ireland to Western Australia: The Establishment of a Branch of the Lefroy Family at Walebing, Western Australia 1842 to 1960*, (no date, published c.1960).

This assessment refers to a number of different buildings (as depicted in the site plan):

- the 'light' horse stables were erected in the 1850s by convict labour (building 'E');
- 1852 living quarters for employees were constructed (building 'D');
- the men's kitchen/dining room, cook's room and store room is also c. 1850s (building 'C');
- the 'old' shearing shed has a 1859 inscription (building 'G');
- main homestead was built 1880 (building 'A');
- the 1892 homestead which utilised the wall and foundations of the original homestead completed in 1851 /52 (building 'B');
- other buildings include: a new shearing shed (building 'F'); a storeroom under the flour mill (building 'H'); foundations of "horse works" (building 'I'); a meat house (building 'K') and a 'heavy' horse stables (building 'J').

The horse-works comprised machinery for gearing to the flour-mill, chaff cutter and other mechanical appliances. It was impelled by a horse which pulled a wooden bar or crank round the perimeter of a fifty foot circle.

The majority of the buildings at *Walebing* were built in the 1850s with the aid of convict labour. After Gerald de Courcy Lefroy left, in 1856, the property was largely developed by overseers as Anthony O'Grady Lefroy's principal business was in Perth. In the late 1870s, Henry Bruce Lefroy (eldest son of Anthony O'Grady Lefroy) took up residence at *Walebing*, and was responsible for the construction of the main homestead in 1880, described in the following section.

The Lefroy family continue to own and run the property.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The building is described in *From Ireland to Western Australia 1842* as follows:

H. B. Lefroy built a house at *Walebing* in 1880 with the intention of living there and managing the property. It is a large building of granite and brick and possesses many attractive features that were lacking in the old building by de Courcy. It was a work involving a great deal of labour. All the necessary timber was hand-sawn and dressed in the Bindoon pits, including the jarrah roof shingles. The latter have since been covered with corrugated iron, and the residence remains sturdy, cool and weatherproof.³³

Generally, the 1880 main homestead is the most sophisticated construction on the site. One of the most appealing features of the collection of buildings at *Walebing* is the homogeneity achieved by the use of the local granite for the construction of the walls. This stone is attractively presented in slightly differing formats throughout the various structures. The difference is attributable to the time spans between the date of construction of each building. Thus, the stonemasons were different and possibly the method of procuring granite was different. Some portions of walls appear to have been built with granite that was readily available, that is, manageable

³³ *ibid.* p.66

block sizes laying on top of the ground. Others have quarried rock which may have been procured with the assistance of fires lit on granite outcrops to split them.

13.3. REFERENCES

Cranfield, R. E. *From Ireland to Western Australia: The Establishment of a Branch of the Lefroy Family at Walebing, Western Australia 1842 to 1960*, (no date, published c.1960).

John Taylor, Architect: Report on Cultural Heritage Significance of 'Walebing' homesteads and associated farm buildings. (for Heritage Council of Western Australia, August 1992)

John Taylor, Architect: Walebing Building C (for Heritage Council of Western Australia, June 1993)