



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

The strong and dramatic forms of the battery machinery, which includes the conveyor belt, storage tanks, and timber and stone shoring, have value for their contribution to an industrial aesthetic. (Criterion 1.1)

The remnant industrial equipment and transformation of the surrounding landforms due to processing activities at *Northampton State Battery* give the place a landmark quality being clearly distinguishable above and against the background of the natural environment. (Criterion 1.3)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Northampton State Battery* illustrates State Government policy to assist the development of the mining industry in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

*Northampton State Battery* is important in its relationship to the third phase of mining activity in the Murchison mineral fields. (Criterion 2.2)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

*Northampton State Battery* has potential as a research site for industrial archaeologists. The equipment which is still arranged in operating configuration, and changes to the immediate surface environment reveal information about the layout and processes of heavy mineral battery practices. (Criterion 3.1)

*Northampton State Battery* demonstrates the technological achievement of a gravity separation plant, for the processing of the poorer grades of mineral ores. (Criterion 3.3)

### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter A *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* North Ryde NSW, Angus & Robertson 1989.

*Northampton State Battery* has value to the local community for its association with the district's mining history. Attempts to utilise the complex as a tourist attraction are indicative of this. (Criterion 4.1)

*Northampton State Battery*, contributes to the district community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

*Northampton State Battery* is the only gravity separation plant for the treatment of heavy minerals in the Western Australian State Battery complex. (Criterion 5.1)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Northampton State Battery* is representative of the technology associated with mineral processing and a past industrial activity in the Northampton area. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Northampton State Battery* is in poor condition. Operations at the plant ceased in 1984 and since then the equipment and fabric of the buildings remaining at the site have been allowed to deteriorate.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The plant is no longer operational and there is little potential for commercial operations to resume but the remaining machinery and buildings are indicative of the original function of the complex. *Northampton State Battery* has moderate integrity. Some plant has been removed.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Northampton State Battery* has a high degree of authenticity. The poor condition of the buildings and structures diminishes the authenticity of the battery site but the location and fabric are representative of the original form of the complex.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Northampton State Battery* is an industrial complex opened, in 1954, to process lead and other heavy mineral ores from the Murchison mineral fields. The site, Reserve No. 24975, consists of the crushing mill, offices, workshop, manager's house, weighbridge and gravity dam.

Lead ore was discovered in the Murchison mineral fields in 1848, and the Geraldine Lead Mine opened in 1849. In 1852, a port was established at Port Gregory with the help of convict labour. A Ticket of Leave hiring depot set up nearby at Lynton provided labour for the mines and the pastoralists. Copper was also mined in the Murchison district. In 1861, Port Gregory was abandoned after proving unsafe for shipping and Geraldton became the port for the mineral fields.<sup>1</sup>

On 19 February 1864, the townsite of Northampton was gazetted on land resumed from William Burges' pastoral lease No. 68. The site was in a valley between the Wanerenooka and Gwalla mine sites.<sup>2</sup> After much lobbying by local people, a railway was built between Northampton and Geraldton to transport ore and wool. This railway line was the first government line built in Western Australia. It was officially opened in 1879, but mining had slumped by this time due to a drop in the price of lead. Many mines closed, some never to reopen.

There were three periods of mining activity in the Murchison. From 1855 to 1882, when only the richest ore was taken; 1910 to 1927; and 1948 to 1956, when ore previously passed over was treated and only a few mines were worked.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the gold discoveries in the 1890s, mining in Western Australia was under the control of a Secretary for Mines responsible to the Commissioner of Crown Lands. The Department of Mines was formed in 1894, with E. H. Wittenoom as its first Commissioner, and the Public Batteries Branch was opened under the control of a Superintendent of Batteries. The public batteries provided crushing, dressing, cyanide and smelting treatments where these facilities were not available 'at a reasonable rate', or where they were not deemed necessary for the development of mining.<sup>4</sup> The first public batteries were opened in 1898, to process gold ore and charged a fee per ton of ore.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The First Hundred Years: Geraldton Centenary 1850-1950* Municipality of Geraldton, [1950], pp. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Suckling, A. J. 'The History of the Northampton District' Teacher's Higher Certificate Optional Thesis, bound typescript, c. 1963, Battye Library, p.117.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.40.

<sup>4</sup> Spillman, K., *A Rich Endowment: Government & Mining in Western Australia 1829-1994*, published to commemorate the centenary of the Department of Minerals & Energy, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1993, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> Dept. of Mines, State Batteries Files.

In 1906, the State Batteries Inquiry Board reported unfavourably on the management and costs of the State Battery system. The result of the report was a general recognition that 'provision of crushing and extraction facilities to the public was first and foremost a form of state aid to mining, with profitability or secondary importance.' A public battery 'might show a heavy loss if considered purely as a commercial concern, and yet have been a great national benefit in bringing about the establishment of a flourishing field'.<sup>6</sup>

Following the Second World War, there was a shortage of base minerals such as lead, and a scarcity of labour and equipment. The Department of Mines gave every encouragement and assistance possible to mineral producers. One such measure was the establishment of Northampton State Battery for the processing of lead ore.

The site for *Northampton State Battery* was gazetted on 27 July 1949, and the treatment plant built and opened in 1954. The site was on Mineral Lease No. 241, known as the Uga mine. The lessee was Edmund Byne. He surrendered a portion of the surface rights of the lease to enable the Dept. of Mines to erect the treatment plant. Water for the plant was drawn from Byne's water shaft, which was situated on the part of the lease which he retained and continued to mine.<sup>7</sup>

In 1957, it was discovered that *Northampton State Battery* was occupying land that had not been included in its originally gazetted site. According to the Superintendent of State Batteries at the time, 'it looks like we were doing a spot of trespassing'. It was proposed to gazette a larger area. The remainder of Victoria Location 10493 was added to *Northampton State Battery* reserve on 11 April 1958.<sup>8</sup>

The following year, the Department of Mines requested that part of the adjoining Native Reserve No. 5885, containing the Uga well, be excised and added to *Northampton State Battery* site to provide water for the manager's house. That part of the Native Reserve had been separated from the rest by the access road to the battery site. On 19 February 1960, the section of land required, now known as Victoria Location 10558, was added to *Northampton State Battery* site with the permission of the Commissioner of Native Welfare.<sup>9</sup> Two years later a further section, Victoria Location 10663, was added making a total of 21 acres. This was slightly reduced again in 1970, when Northampton Shire Council widened the access road.<sup>10</sup>

*Northampton State Battery* was established to process the poorer grades of ore that were mined during the third period of activity in the Murchison mineral fields. Prior to its establishment, small miners had processed their lead ore by hand, which was possible when only the richest ores were taken. Some of the

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<sup>6</sup> Spillman, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Dept. of Mines, State Batteries File, 3072/77 Vol. 4.

<sup>8</sup> ibid.

<sup>9</sup> This Native Reserve was unoccupied. The District Officer for the Mines Department suggested that the Reserve be cancelled and returned to the Lands Department for disposal. The Commissioner of Native Welfare did not want to give it up in total, but had no qualms about relinquishing a portion of it. Department of Mines, State Batteries File, 1922/80, Vol. 6, Letter from District Officer, 20 August 1959.

<sup>10</sup> Dept. of Mines, State Batteries File, 1922/80 Vol. 6; maps showing gazetted changes to Reserve No. 24975 (see supporting material).

largest mines had their own crushers. Lead was used in lead batteries, petrol, paint, casting of hand-set printing type, and lead pewter.<sup>11</sup> The lead tailings were also used to surface roads, as well as the Northampton School playground, before the dangers of lead were known (or acknowledged).<sup>12</sup>

*Northampton State Battery* was also capable of crushing base metal ores such as tin, tantalite, scheelite, tungsten and copper. The Battery originally charged £1 per ton of ore with a minimum charge of £10. This was increased to £1-10 in 1955, but two years later was brought back to the original price when mining dropped off in the district due to a drop in prices.<sup>13</sup> A mineral royalty payable to the Government was introduced in 1958, but lead, copper and mineral sands were exempt due to their depressed prices.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, *Northampton State Battery* struggled on processing relatively small volumes of ore. Profit margins were low for the miners and Government subsidies were sought for transporting ore to the crushing site. Crushing fees were not always paid and, at one point, the Government considered claiming uncrushed ore, left at *Northampton State Battery*, to recover debts.<sup>15</sup>

By the late 1970s, Northampton Shire was requesting improvements to *Northampton State Battery* 'in case of possible re-opening of mines in the area'. However, State Government intervention in mining was dwindling as company-driven exploration and development became the norm, and no improvements were forthcoming.<sup>16</sup> In 1980, the place was vested in the Minister for Mines in order to protect the tailings lying on the site. That year, 2,461.4 tonnes of ore was treated. In 1981 this had declined to 37 tonnes and in 1982, to 8.4 tonnes. The cost of keeping *Northampton State Battery* operating remained high. In 1982, \$47,631.66 was spent for receipts of \$592.31.<sup>17</sup> *Northampton State Battery* had never been a highly profitable venture, and low usage, low returns, outdated equipment, and the probability that the mines would not re-open in the foreseeable future, led to the end of operations.<sup>18</sup>

In a letter on the future of *Northampton State Battery* the Superintendent of State Batteries, Ted Green, wrote, on 23 March 1983:

Test work on tailing recovery does not indicate any viable potential for the sheelite, lead zinc or garnet residues...In the recent report on State Batteries Mr Field suggests "The Battery at Northampton should be mothballed with the distinct possibility that it will shortly be dismantled or sold". I see very little potential for activity in the minerals suitable for treatment in this plant and recommend that the Shire of

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<sup>11</sup> Telephone conversation between Ted Green and Irene Ham-Sauman, 13 May 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Dept. Of Mines, State Batteries File, 1922/80.

<sup>13</sup> Dept of Mines, State Batteries File, 506/54 & 420/57.

<sup>14</sup> Spillman, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Dept of Mines, State Batteries File, 3864/68, 26 August 1977.

<sup>16</sup> Spillman, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Dept. of Mines, State Batteries File, 1549/80 Vol. 18.

<sup>18</sup> **Note:** Labour history of Northampton State Battery is not available. Files in possession of the Mines Department do not cover employment. According to Public Service Records for the period, no public servants were employed at the Battery, and any employment records kept at the Battery site have been lost or destroyed.

Northampton be offered a lease of the plant and transfer of the Manager to keep the plant in an operational order and treat small parcels as they become available.<sup>19</sup>

*Northampton State Battery* was placed under 'care and maintenance' in November 1984.<sup>20</sup>

*Northampton State Battery* is the only gravity separation plant for the concentration of heavy minerals in the State Battery complex. There were a total of 72 batteries controlled by the State Batteries Branch during its lifetime, most of which were for the processing of gold ore.<sup>21</sup>

The possible closure of *Northampton State Battery* prompted Northampton Shire Town Clerk, H. J. Fraser, to write to the Mines Department on 15 March 1983, expressing concern about the battery's future, and suggesting it may be used as a tourist attraction. After *Northampton State Battery* closed, the Shire requested funds to 'undertake study of best methods of preserving this very important historical facility'. The Tourism Commission also weighed in, suggesting, on 8 November 1984, that the Mines Department contact their Regional Tourism Section.

The Mines Department replied that they had no objection to the Shire using *Northampton State Battery* as a tourist destination, provided it was appropriately maintained and covered by Public Liability Insurance. 'Although demand for the use of the battery is at a low ebb at present it is possible that changes in metal prices could bring about a call for its use again.' However, due to lack of funds, Northampton Shire was unable to proceed with its plans to develop *Northampton State Battery* as a tourist facility.

In February 1987, the State Batteries Branch of the Mines Department was closed and all existing batteries were transferred to the control of the Perth Mint and Gold Corporation.

### 13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Northampton State Battery* is located on Horrocks Road, approximately 1.5 kilometres from the centre of the town. The site is accessed by a gravel road on the south side of Horrocks Road. Recent rains have washed away the cross-over to the site, located close to the main road over Nokanena Brook, making regular vehicle access impassible. The site has a gentle gradient and vegetation is predominantly low scrub.

The buildings on the site comprise the manager's residence and garage, a weighbridge, office, workshop and crushing plant.

A timber post and rail fence extends across the front of the single-storey manager's residence which is located in the north-east corner of the site and is of standard, post-war, domestic construction with asbestos cladding and a tiled roof. A water tank on a timber stand is situated at the rear of the house which is partially enclosed with a corrugated fibre board fence. The garage is clad in asbestos and corrugated iron and has a single pitch roof.

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<sup>19</sup>       ibid.

<sup>20</sup>       ibid.

<sup>21</sup>       Dept. Of Mines, State Batteries Files.

The weighbridge is a free standing, timber framed structure with corrugated iron cladding. A concrete pad is located adjacent to the weighbridge at the side of the road.

The office is a timber framed building with a concrete floor and asbestos and corrugated iron cladding. Some sanitary fittings and furniture remain.

The plant area is partially enclosed in a corrugated iron clad building. Timber trusses supporting the pitched roof are still evident. Other machinery and equipment including storage tanks and a conveyor belt are free standing, supported on metal and timber braced framing. The land drops steeply beneath the end of the ramp which is retained by timber boarded wall with steel shoring to the south-east and a curved stone wall to the north-west.

Only the metal framed stand remains at the location of the pump house, on the other side of Nokanena Brook. Elsewhere on the site there are piles of rusting scrap metal. A sign, located west of the weighbridge, carries the warning: "This material contains lead and should not be used on residential lots or areas used for public recreation."

The buildings and structures on *Northampton State Battery* site are in poor condition and have been subject to vandalism since the closure of the battery in late 1984.

### **13. 3 REFERENCES**

No key references.

### **13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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