



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 place, now a park, involves none of the usual gravestones, headstones and memorials generally associated with a cemetery. The place does not have aesthetic significance for the general community because the only identification of the former Sikh Cemetery is a mound of rocks set in concrete, within the parkland. (Criterion 1.1)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Fmr Sikh Cemetery demonstrates the cultural diversity of the population and the way in which the needs of small segments of the community were met, particularly when contrasted with the actions of a similar ethnic minority such as the Chinese. (Criterion 2.1)

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is significant in the history of undertaking and cremation in Western Australia, and is associated with the introduction of the Cremation Act of 1929. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Fmr Sikh Cemetery has social significance when considered in association with other Perth cemeteries and burial grounds of other different ethnic groups. There are no headstones or other visual reminders of the period, except for a recent group of rocks that have been built as a memorial to identify the site as the former Sikh Cemetery. It is a reminder of the different values and traditions of Australian culture and the early settlement of the area.

In the 19th century, the burial grounds associated with various religious denominations were separate as in the case of the East Perth cemeteries. Each denomination, with the exception of the Chinese community, owned their own burial ground (acknowledgement - Conservation Plan East Perth cemeteries Ron Bodycoat February 1992).

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is highly valued by the Sikh community of Western Australia for its association with the cultural, social and religious life of that community. (Criterion 4.1)

The place contributes to the Sikh community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Fmr Sikh Cemetery represents a rare phenomenon in the history and cultural heritage of the State, in that it recognises individual practice and requirements of a cultural group at a time when conformity to established English and Australian practice was the norm. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is representative of many small town cemeteries where local communities place importance on the preservation of their links with the early settlement of their district. (Criterion 6.1)

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is representative of the Hindu custom of cremation of the dead and of the reservation of small portions of land, usually in country areas, for the purpose of cemeteries.

12. 3 CONDITION

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is maintained as a park by the City of Canning in good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Due to landscaping and earthworks undertaken as part of the Bicentennial the *Fmr Sikh Cemetery* has a low degree of physical integrity. Nevertheless it retains a high degree of social integrity as a pioneer cemetery and as a reminder of the Sikh Community within the area.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

There are no visual items relating to the authenticity of the place as *Fmr Sikh Cemetery*.

Further investigation by use of scientific monitoring equipment such as scanning equipment used to locate ground disturbance, similar to that used for Rottneest Island Board investigation of Aboriginal remains, may be possible.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Lise Summers, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by J C Keen, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former *Sikh Cemetery* (1932 - 1977), was gazetted in 1932 as Reserve 20968 for the purpose of a cemetery. The former reserve now forms part of the larger Bicentennial Adenia Reserve in Ferndale. It is identified within the larger reserve by means of a Heritage Trail marker, installed as part of the Heritage Trail project of the Australian Bicentennial Committee in 1988.

The Sikh community in Western Australia can date its antecedents back to the 1870s, if not earlier. In 1835, John Lawrence Morley is reported to have returned to the Colony from Madras bringing with him 12 servants. Three years later, in 1838, Thomas Lyell Symers returned with a further 10¹. In 1879, a number of Indian 'Coolies' were imported, on a supposed temporary basis, to provide an additional workforce.² By 1898, the Sikh community was well established, although lacking recognition, both as a separate ethnic community, and as British citizens. The Sikhs particularly disliked being referred to as 'Afghans' by the white colonists. In fact, many of the men, signatories to a petition for greater recognition of their role in the community, had fought for the British against the Afghans.³

While seeking to be recognised as British Subjects, and therefore eligible for naturalisation in Western Australia, the Sikh community also sought to retain its cultural heritage and traditional practices. In line with the larger Hindu community, Sikhs followed the practice of cremation of the dead. In similar circumstances Western Australia's Chinese community had turned to European undertakers making a 'significant compromise to abandon the traditional rituals and accept ordinary Australian practice.'⁴

Cremation was not legally recognised in Western Australian law until the passing of the Cremations Act of 1929. However, a cremation is known to have taken place in Kalgoorlie Cemetery in 1910⁵, and more took place in other country areas and at Woodmans Point Quarantine Station.⁶ Recognition of the religious needs of the small Sikh community resulted in the gazettal of a separate Sikh cemetery in 1932, a few years prior to the building of the crematorium at Karrakatta. The reserve was vested in two members of the Sikh community, Bulla and Massa Singh. In 1971, the Sikh

¹ J.S. Battye Library staff - *Research Notes (RN) 860*, occasional series of research material prepared by Battye Staff, usually in response to a particular written query, which is then bound and indexed to assist later researchers. Information regarding Indian servants at Albany derived from Garden, Donald - *Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1837*.

² Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO file 718/1879 as quoted in RN860).

³ Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO file 227/1898 as quoted in RN 860).

⁴ Ryan, Jan 'Chinese Burials in Western Australia in the Nineteenth Century' in *Studies in Western Australian History* Vol.12, 1990, p.9.

⁵ *The Western Argus* 8 November 1910, p.15.

⁶ Heritage and Conservation Professionals 'City of Canning Municipal Inventory'.

community sought to have the vesting altered as neither Bulla or Massa were alive. They also sought to have the size of the reserve extended.⁷

No record of cremations at the cemetery has been found.⁸ The reserve was cancelled in 1977 and reverted to public open space. Landscaping and earthworks took place over the site in the late 1980s, when the Canning Regional Park was developed.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Fmr Sikh Cemetery is a small area of 0.2 hectares, formally a 'C' class reserve within the Bicentennial Adenia Reserve, located in Ferndale on the left bank of the Canning River. The present public open space was modified as part of the redevelopment of the area in the late 1980s, as a result of minor earthworks and tree planting. A group of rocks record the site. A plaque erected to record this has been removed by vandals.

13. 3 REFERENCES

No key references.

⁷ Richards, Oline 'Canning River Regional Park, Western Australia Regional Survey' prepared for the Canning River Regional Park Management Committee, Department of Planning and Urban Development, October 1991, p.66.

⁸ Heritage and Conservation Professionals op. cit.