



# 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\*

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins*, with its mud brick walls, long verandahs and separate kitchen, is a good example of North-West vernacular architecture. (Criterion 1.1)

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* was of high quality workmanship and demonstrates techniques of mud brick construction that are important for the local material components and the design detail of the arched openings. (Criterion 1.2)

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* presents a landmark quality in the pastoral landscape. (Criterion 1.3)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* has associations with the development of the pastoral industry in the Pilbara district since 1893, and the Roebourne Roads Board during the 1920s and early 1930s. (Criterion 2.1)

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* has close associations with many Aboriginal people who worked and lived on the property. (Criteria 2.2 & 2.3)

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* has close associations with early pastoralists in the Pilbara, particularly H. Meares, S. H. Viveash, W. H. and T. D. Cusack, C. O. Ferguson, and R. and L. Parsons, all of whom played an important role in the development of the North-West pastoral industry, and to a lesser degree, Lang Hancock. (Criterion 2.3)

The place is also associated with Olive Cusack, who lived at Tambrey Station before becoming headmistress at the Presbyterian Ladies College in Perth. (Criterion 2.3)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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

The mud brick construction and building techniques displayed in the arches over the windows and doors are distinctive for their workmanship and design in an isolated region in the 1890s. (Criteria 3.1 & 3.2)

The complex of structures at *Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* contributes to an understanding of a way of life associated with pastoralism and the development of that industry in the North-West. (Criterion 3.2)

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* has the potential to contribute to knowledge regarding the method of construction and the qualities of the construction material. (Criterion 3.3)

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

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* contributes to the community's sense of place as a former pastoral station homestead and for its associations with pioneer families and the Roebourne Roads Board, and as a social meeting place during the 1920s and 1930s. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

The mud brick ruin is thought to be the only remaining 1890s construction of its type and period in the Tablelands region. (Criterion 5.1)

The mud brick construction and building techniques displayed in the arches over the windows and doors are an example of distinctive workmanship and design. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* is representative of a range of activities associated with pastoral development in the North-West, and of the activities of subsequent generations. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* has been vacant since 1950. The condition of the place reflects the effects of the environment, abandonment and neglect since that time. Part of the roof was ripped off during a cyclone in 1982 and, although most of the walls remain intact, the 'front' wall on the east side has deteriorated and partially collapsed. The other structures on the place are in ruin or show only minimal remains. The grave site is neat and maintained. The condition of *Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* is poor.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The original intent of the place was as a pastoral settlement and a base for the pastoral activity of the station. Although the place is now vacant and in ruin, the original intent is still clear. The long term viability of restoring the place is questionable. The integrity of the place, as the ruin of a pastoral homestead, is moderate.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* demonstrates a high degree of authenticity with no obvious interventions to the 1893 fabric of the homestead, apart from general deterioration caused by exposure to the elements since its abandonment.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been researched and compiled by Laura Gray, heritage and conservation consultant, with some primary research by Gillian O'Mara, archival researcher. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* is the remains of a single-storey mud brick and iron dwelling and associated outbuildings, located on the main road to Wittenoom Gorge, 190 kilometres south-east of Roebourne by road. It was incorporated into Coolawanyah Station in 1950, by which time the place had been vacated.

In 1861, an exploration party led by Francis T. Gregory, arrived at the cove at the head of Nickol Bay, landing near the site of what was to become the town of Roebourne. Gregory led an expedition inland reaching the area of the existing Millstream Station which is the adjoining station west of Tambrey Station.<sup>1</sup> After the publication of Gregory's journal, in which he recorded the agricultural potential of the land, prospective settlers from the Swan River and Eastern colonies vied for pastoral leases in the area.

In 1865, the Government Resident R. J. Sholl arrived to provide assistance in establishing the settlement. He set up camp close to the Withnells and arranged explorations to find a suitable site for the capital of the north. After extensive explorations, he decided that their camp site at Harding River was most suitable for the townsite. Roebourne, the first gazetted town in the North-West, was proclaimed on 17 August 1866.<sup>2</sup> The town was named for J. S. Roe, the first Surveyor-General in the colony of Western Australia.

Eleven stations consisting of 446,856 hectares were subsequently leased by Withnell family members. Emma and John Withnell's daughter, Emily, married John Goldsmith Meares in 1886, and her daughter Ellen married Roy Parsons who leased Coolawanyah Station, which now incorporates Tambrey Station. The Parsons family still own and manage the station.<sup>3</sup>

In 1866, E. T. Hooley forged the inland stock route from Champion Bay to Nickol Bay. Wells were established along the stock route, and more settlers drove their stock northwards and settled.<sup>4</sup>

Samuel Henry Viveash was the son of the doctor of the same name who had arrived in the Colony in 1838 and settled in the Avon district. In the mid-1860s, Viveash (jnr), in association with Messrs Wilkinson and Middleton, sailed to Cossack with several hundred sheep and three horses. They were

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<sup>1</sup> Withnell Taylor, N. E. *A saga of the Northwest Yeera-muk-a-doo; The first settlement of north-west Australia told through the Withnell and Hancock families 1861-1890*. Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1987, pp. 16-22.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.

greeted by some of the earlier pastoralists, including William Shakespeare Hall, Walter Padbury and the Withnells.<sup>5</sup>

Viveash, Wilkinson and Middleton acquired Andover Station from L. C. Burges and established themselves there. Andover Station had been established in 1866 when Burges took over some of the leases of Inthernura Station. Inthernura comprised Lease 1 located at Gregory's Camp 49, and had originally been taken up by Wellard. Later, Viveash took over Andover Station on his own account and employed Henry Seymour Meares as manager and William Henry Cusack as jackaroo and blacksmith.<sup>6</sup>

Tambrey Station was formerly part of another lease of Inthernura Station, which was held by Viveash. Tambrey dates from the mid-1880s when Henry Seymour Meares held the lease. In 1892, Cusack went to Tambrey to work.

The homestead was built in 1893, during the time that Cusack was the manager of the property. It was constructed with antbed mud bricks containing chopped up spinifex and dags from the woolshed which were mixed in to help it bind together.<sup>7</sup> The walls were only 2.45 metres (8ft) high as construction of the dwelling had to be expedited due to the expected birth of Mrs Cusack's child. The walls were halted at the existing height and consequently the verandah perimeter has a low roof. The roof timbers were cut from nearby trees. There were no door or window frames and the openings are arched, with 700 mm wide window sills.

In 1902, Cusack went into partnership with Henry Meares in the leasehold of Tambrey Station. H. S. Meares was identified with Tambrey for over 30 years, and served on various Roads Boards and other organisations involved in the progress of the North-West.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Ogilvie Ferguson was employed on Tambrey Station by Meares and Cusack, and gained such experience that he bought an interest in the property. Within four years of his arrival, at the request of his partners, he took over the management of the station. Ferguson also served as the Chairman of the Tableland Roads Board and on other committees for the advancement of the region, and was made a Commissioner of the Peace in 1910. He was the son of Charles William Ferguson, and grandson of Dr John Ferguson, of 'Houghton' in the Swan District.<sup>9</sup>

In 1915, Tambrey comprised 161,874 hectares with a capacity for 20,000 sheep.<sup>10</sup>

During the years of World War One, both Henry Meares and William Cusack died, leaving Charles Ferguson in charge of Tambrey Station.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> National Trust assessment exposition undated; Battye, J. S. (ed) *Cyclopedia of Western Australia* Hussey & Gillingham, Adelaide, 1912, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview 22 May 1997, Les Parsons interviewed by Laura Gray, at Parson's Perth residence, Stevens St Bindoon.

<sup>8</sup> Battye, J. S. (ed) *History of the North West of Australia* V. K. Jones & Co., Perth, 1915, pp. 221, 222; Withnell Taylor N. E. *op cit.* p. 158; National Trust assessment exposition undated.

<sup>9</sup> Battye, J. S. (ed) *History of the North West of Australia* pp. 221, 222.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Oral history transcript, by Michael Adams 1977 (edited); Cusack, O. 'Unnamed Memoirs', held by Karratha Community Library Local History Collection, n.d.

In 1920, Jones, McMullan and Roy Parsons took up Coolawanyah Station, which adjoined Tambrey Station, as the only known example of a Soldier Settlement station in the district.<sup>12</sup> Roy Parsons later bought Jones and McMullan out and c.1935 married Ellen Meares (granddaughter of John and Emma Withnell) of Pyramid Station.<sup>13</sup>

From c.1922 Cusack's son, Thomas D. Cusack, took over management of the Tambrey Station, and it seems likely that some alterations may have taken place at that time. When Thomas arrived with his wife Olive to live in the homestead, it was a four-roomed building situated on a limestone plateau at the top of a rise.<sup>14</sup> Many Roads Board meetings were held at Tambrey Homestead during the time that Tom Cusack was the Roebourne Roads Board Chairman and Olive was the Secretary. A comprehensive library was held at the house, but unfortunately termites penetrated the mudwalls and books constantly. Termites also destroyed the road workers' pay cheques on one occasion.<sup>15</sup>

The Cusacks had three children. At the back of the sleeping quarters there was a big bough shed which held all the children's beds. In front of the house was a small lawn with poinciana trees and a lone orange tree. Beside the garden, Olive Cusack had a tennis court built, carved out of limestone at one end, and filled at the other end with the assistance of the Aboriginal labourers. Later William Cusack laid an anthill surface on the tennis court.<sup>16</sup>

Several outbuildings were adjacent to the main house. The bathroom and kitchen, with two large flat iron tables, a large wood burning stove and two large ovens and a pise bread oven, were located behind the house. Later, the bathroom was removed and a concrete floored meat house was constructed. A wash house was located on the right of the kitchen, and a line of date palms marked the open drain from the bath and wash houses. Only one date palm remains on the site. Beyond the meat house was the cook's room, and parallel to that about ten metres beyond, was a long line of storerooms, food, tool and saddle rooms, a covered garage for two cars, and Mr Ferguson's quarters.

The sheds at the back were probably the big store. You see you only got your supplies up once a year on the state ships from J & W Bateman, you'd get a ton of flour, a ton of or a couple of tons of flour and a ton of sugar, and a couple of crates of jam, and a caddy of tea. The flour was in 50 pound [22.7 kg] bags in bundles of three. Sugar was in 80 pound [36.3 kg] bags.<sup>17</sup>

The buildings were at the top of the rise called Ford Hill, because it was where the 'T' model Ford could get a running start. Behind the storeroom, the creek ran occasionally, and on the opposite side was the Aboriginal workers' camp. At the foot of Ford Hill, the tea-tree sided stables were attached to the stockyards. Although the stables were extant in 1976, there were no obvious remains in 1997. A bountiful vegetable garden was tended most of the year, and a milking cow was kept.

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<sup>12</sup> Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview Les Parons, 22 May 1997, op cit.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Oral history transcript, 1977 (edited); Cusack, unnamed memoirs, op cit.; National Trust assessment exposition undated.

<sup>16</sup> Oral history transcript, 1977 (edited); Cusack, unnamed memoirs, op cit.

<sup>17</sup> Memo, HCWA File 2343, interview 20 May 1997, Doug Stove interviewed by Laura Gray.

Tennis parties at Tambrey drew people from throughout the district, bringing their children, food and Aboriginal workers. The men camped in the wool shed and shearers quarters, and the women squeezed along the verandahs. Competitions were run over weekends, and Tambrey even challenged the Town of Roebourne to a tournament.<sup>18</sup> The Bauhinia tree, from the Kimberley, and the Kurrajong tree were both planted by the Cusacks, and the spectators used to sit under the Bauhinia tree to watch the tennis.<sup>19</sup>

The original six stand shearing shed was replaced by a new shearing shed with machinery and new yards c.1930. The 18 paddocks on Tambrey were complemented by another 17 paddocks at the Hooley outcamp, which was taken up during a drought in an effort to find feed. Shearing sheds and quarters were located at both places. The quarters were bush timber, and out of shearing season, the road workers often camped there.<sup>20</sup> A large shearing shed was built at Tambrey in the 1940s. Every shearer had his own pen and the whole thing was under one massive curved roof, even the sheep yards were under it, like an enormous Nissan hut. Circa 1963, this shearing shed was burnt to the ground. It had been used only infrequently because the sheep had more recently been taken to Hooley for shearing.<sup>21</sup>

Tom Cusack did not arrive at the December 1936 Roads Board meeting, and the meeting was abandoned. The search for Tom extended over the following days. His body was located on about the third day of the search, and it seems he accidentally shot himself when out kangaroo shooting. Tom was buried on a rise to the east of the Tambrey homestead and his tombstone was paid for by a road gang working at Tambrey at the time. Olive Cusack remained at Tambrey, and Charles (Bud) Ferguson continued to manage the place. Later Olive Cusack left Tambrey Station and subsequently became the headmistress at Presbyterian Ladies College.<sup>22</sup>

In 1949, Lang Hancock brought Hooley and Tambrey Stations from Ferguson and the Cusack family for £ 50,000 and continued the practice of walking the sheep from Tambrey to Hooley for shearing.<sup>23</sup> Tambrey Station would never have been a viable concern without Hooley and although it is a considerable distance between the two, the plentiful supply of Aboriginal labour in the early days made the successful running of both stations possible.

There were two stations between Tambrey and Hooley - Coolawanyah to the north-east of Tambrey and Mt Florence, east of Coolawanyah. Coolawanyah Station comprised only 48,562 hectares and had originally been an outcamp of Hammersley and Croyden Stations. As the property developed and the Parsons family grew, the place became too small and more land was sought.<sup>24</sup>

In 1950, Les Parsons of Coolawanyah Station went into partnership with Sir Edward H Lefroy, of Cranmore in Moora, to buy Tambrey and Hooley

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<sup>18</sup> Oral history transcript, 1977 (edited); Cusack, unnamed memoirs, op cit.

<sup>19</sup> Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview Les Parsons, 22 May 1997, op cit.

<sup>20</sup> Oral history transcript, 1977 (edited); Cusack, unnamed memoirs, op cit.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Memo, HCWA File 2343. interview Doug Stove, 20 May 1997, op cit; National Trust assessment exposition, undated; site visit 4 May 1997 by Laura Gray.

<sup>23</sup> Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview Les Parsons, 22 May 1997, op cit.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

Stations from Hancock for £50,000. Lefroy was a 'silent partner' and the Parsons family ran the stations.<sup>25</sup> Les Parsons recalls Tambrey when he took over in 1950:

The sheds had a long verandah, south to north, men's room, saddle room, and storeroom with bars on the window. The bush timber cart shed was located near the date palm. Old garden, don't recall palms, long drop toilet was there, and the blackfella camp, still see what's left of it.<sup>26</sup>

Parsons ran Hooley, Coolawanyah and Tambrey Stations separately until c.1970, when he merged Tambrey and Coolawanyah. He continued to run Hooley separately for a long time before selling it. In 1973, Roy Parson's son, Les, and his wife Maxine, bought out the Lefroys and Les replaced the homestead building roof.

During the later half of the 1970s, the Parsons family and other pastoralists decided to convert the property from sheep to cattle. This was a notable development in the North-West pastoral industry and happened for two basic reasons; firstly, for economic reasons as sheep are labour intensive, and secondly because dingoes were killing the sheep. The cattle stock was soon built up, by selling off the scrubbers (feral cattle) and putting the proceeds into buying good quality cattle, and all the sheep were sold off.<sup>27</sup> Some of the homestead roof was removed in about 1982 during a cyclone.<sup>28</sup>

Olive Cusack, nicknamed 'Dosh', died in 1985, and her ashes were placed at the grave of her husband at Tambrey Homestead. Her memorial plaque reads *Dosh Cusack 1895-1985 'His Majesty seeks and loves courageous souls'*. The Cusack grave site has been fenced by the Cusack descendants, and is regularly maintained by them.

The Parsons leases, including Tambrey, extend for 86km along the foot of the Hamersley Range on the banks of the Fortescue River, and extend over 303,514 hectares, carrying about 4,000 head of cattle which are live exported out of Port Hedland to Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>29</sup>

In 1997, *Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* is vacant and unused and the Station forms part of the larger Coolawanyah Station.

### 13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* consists of a group of building remains in close proximity on the northern side of a creek and the remains of a group of shearing related buildings on the southern side of the creek. *Tambrey Station Homestead Ruins* is visible from the Roebourne Wittenoom Road, being located about 500 metres to the north of the road.

The ruins include the mud brick homestead, the adjacent kitchen, meathouse and cook's room, and storeroom, saddle room, stables, tool room, garages, and managers' quarters. The shearing shed, shearers kitchen, quarters and yards are south of the creek. To gain a full understanding of the workings of

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<sup>25</sup> ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ibid.

<sup>27</sup> ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Phone conversation, Laura Gray with Les Parsons (owner in 1997), Karratha, 3 May 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview Les Parsons, 22 May 1997, op cit.

the station homestead the other buildings on the site need to be considered in their context.

The homestead is situated on a level plateau above the creek. The surrounding land is undulating with a range of hills in the west, and a small rise north east of the homestead where Cusack's grave is located.

The homestead was built in 1893. It is typical of North-West vernacular dwellings, a rectangular building with surrounding verandahs, thick walls, in this example constructed of anthill mud brick with a corrugated iron roof, and a separate kitchen structure. The place does not conform to any particular style but it does display some characteristics of the Victorian Georgian c.1840-c.1890 in the broad interpretation of a freestanding rural homestead.<sup>30</sup>

The homestead was constructed of mud bricks made from locally found materials; anthills, spinifex and sheep dags. The craftsmanship of the arched openings is unusual in the use of mud brick, and in such an isolated situation. No frames seem to have been inserted into the window and door openings. Large brackets have been inserted into the wall structure (possibly c.1922), from which the doors and window shutters were hung.

The rectangular plan form of the homestead runs north/south, with the long verandahs on the east and west sides. The plan comprises two separate interconnecting rooms which open onto the verandah, located north and central, and the south end comprises two small rooms which do not connect, and only open onto the verandah. The smaller of the two rooms had white washed walls. Two corners of the verandah have been built in with a timber and corrugated iron structure.

The roof partly covers the homestead building. The gable is constructed of milled timber, indicating it is not the original construction. It is probably part of the 1973 roof replacement. The east wall has partially collapsed, but the other walls are in place to roof height. The interior walls show signs of having been mud rendered over the brickwork. The central room has a large open fireplace constructed of the same mud brick as the rest of the place. Some evidence remains of a timber floor. The bearer board in situ has 'Cossack' stamped on it. No evidence of the ceilings, doors or windows remain.

The verandah was supported by bush timber poles, some of which remain in place. The verandah roof which is collapsed around the dwelling, shows evidence of some intervention in the form of iron rails which have replaced the timber support structure (rafters).

The levelled area in front of the dwelling, on the eastern side, was the tennis courts. The Bauhinia tree is central in the level area.

East of the tennis court is a sharp decline to the creek bed, and a series of c.1930 stock water troughs.

North of the dwelling, is an unidentified bush timber structure, and the remains of a corrugated iron water tank.

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<sup>30</sup> Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., op cit, p. 45.  
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The outbuildings immediately to the west of the homestead comprised the kitchen, meathouse, cook's room, and storeroom. The bush timber structure remains in place, and the hipped corrugated iron roof is still in place on the meathouse. The row of buildings west of the kitchen buildings, are also framed in bush timber. Some sheets of corrugated iron wall cladding are still in place, and part of a hipped roof is also evident. The concrete floors are still in place. The remains of the bush timber cart shed are still in place near the palm tree.

South of the creek, the site of the burnt out shearing shed is marked by the remains of the bush timber posts. The shearers kitchen is identified by the remains of a rock slab floor. Stock yards are still evident west and north of the shearers' kitchen site.

There are no apparent signs of the vegetable garden, and only one palm tree remains. The site of the Aboriginal camp is indeterminate. The grave site is located on a rise north-east of the dwelling, and is surrounded by a fence.

The homestead and associated buildings have been vacant since 1950. The deterioration and weathering since that time has resulted in the ruinous condition that the place now presents.

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Memo, HCWA File 1743, interview 22 May 1997, Les Parsons interviewed by Laura Gray, at the Parsons' residence, Stevens Street, Bindoon.

Oral history transcript, by Michael Adams 1977 (edited); Cusack, O. 'Unnamed Memoirs', held by Karratha Community Library Local History Collection, n.d.

### **13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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