



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

Basildene Farmhouse has harmonious proportions and generous volumes. (Criterion 1.1)

It is a landmark building, being directly visible from Wallcliffe Road. It contributes to the aesthetic qualities of a steep and picturesque valley. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Basildene Farmhouse has historic significance because of its association with the Willmott family. (Criterion 2.3)

The place demonstrates excellence in design and workmanship in the jarrah staircase and the large central hall. (Criterion 2.4)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Basildene Farmhouse is highly valued by the community due to its landmark quality, historical associations, aesthetic interest and its potential tourist value. (Criterion 4.1)

The building contributes to the community's sense of place because of its landmark quality and its historical association as the home of several generations of the farming Willmott family. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

The use of a large double volumed central hallway in an otherwise relatively compact building is unusual. As such *Basildene Farmhouse* has significance. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Basildene Farmhouse is confidently executed, representative of the self assured society that produced it. It was also built as a statement of ownership and pride by the owners who had, a few years before the construction of *Basildene Farmhouse*, acquired the land on which it stands. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Basildene Farmhouse is in good condition, although external iron reinforcing bands have been inserted to counter differential settlement. A stone buttress to the western side has been built to strengthen the western wall. In addition, judging by a cross shaped iron plate that is visible externally, a tie rod has also been inserted about half way up the first floor on the southern side, probably to counter spreading of external walls below the eastern roof. The tie rod itself is hidden in a cavity formed between the existing stone wall and a plasterboard wall of recent construction.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The integrity of *Basildene Farmhouse* is fair. What was a private farmhouse is now a Bed and Breakfast, however, the original function of the building remains obvious.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is moderate. The original building has undergone extensive planning modifications, such as the insertion of ensuite bathrooms and the removal of a ground floor wall to form the present dining room. The western facade of the original building has been painted with an ochre coloured waterproof coating. In the guest rooms, carpets have been laid over the original floorboards. The soffit to the entrance verandah is asbestos, not the authentic timber lining of the first floor verandah. Large extensions to the rear, of almost the same area as the ground floor of the original house, have been built in recent times.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Elise de Munck, B.A. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Basildene Farmhouse is situated on six hectares of bushland about 1.5km west of Margaret River about 280km SW of Perth. It was built in 1912 by William Henry Percival Willmott, who was commonly known as Percy.¹

Willmott married Margaret Brockman (grand-daughter of John Garrett Bussell of Busselton) in October 1894. He became the first Head Lightkeeper of Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse when it was completed in 1895 and spent fourteen years in that capacity, residing with his wife and growing family in one of the lighthouse cottages, before taking up land at Margaret River.²

Sussex Location 632 on Yalgardup Brook was originally surveyed in December 1908 for T.E. Higgins who initially took up the land under Conditional Purchase Lease 18736/55.³ Records cannot be located detailing the transfer of this lease to Willmott but this probably took place about 1910 when he reputedly moved onto the property. The family are said to have lived in a shack made from flattened kerosene tins while they cleared the land and decided where to build.⁴

In 1911, the family sailed for England where they spent twelve months holidaying and visiting relatives. It was during this period that Willmott is thought to have designed the house he planned to build on his Margaret River land. The design was based on a relative's property near Reading called 'Basildon'.⁵

On his return to Western Australia, Willmott engaged Yallingup builder Robert Donald to construct his house, a two-storey edifice with four rooms upstairs and four downstairs. It was built of local stone and locally milled jarrah and karri timber with a jarrah staircase leading to the upper rooms. The large central hallway occupying a two-storey space in the centre of the building was a distinctive feature of the design.⁶

Percy Willmott died in February 1920⁷ and the leasehold of the property was transferred to his executor, The WA Trustee, Executor and Agency Co Ltd, the company also named on the first Certificate of Title issued in 1932.⁸ Willmott's descendants continued to live there and farm the property which eventually passed into the hands of his grandson, Ross Willmott, in 1972.⁹ It was classified by the National Trust in 1978.

1 *West Australian*, 5 August 1987, p.68.

2 Watson, Rose 'Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse' (1978), p.42.

3 DOLA: W.H. Sainsbury, Field Book 96 & Diagram 31664.

4 *West Australian*, 5 December 1992.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid & National Trust Classification File 14.

7 'Margaret River Cemeteries' BL - PR2640.

8 DOLA: Certificate of Title 1029/35.

9 Rose, Dallas & Bradfield, Howard (compilers) 'Settlers of Margaret River' (1981).

In 1984, *Basildene Farmhouse* was sold for \$850 000 to Amberwave Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of the Colonial Development Corporation. This company announced plans for restoration of the building which was to be converted to a BYO restaurant and holiday accomodation.¹⁰ Three years later the place was put up for auction.¹¹ The enterprise was managed at that time by Jenny and Geoff Petre.¹² In 1991, *Basildene Farmhouse* was purchased by Ron and Kay Macfarlane who commenced renovations which were completed in 1992. The main changes made to the building at that time were the addition of en-suites to each guest room.¹³ *Basildene Farmhouse* remains in use as a ten bedroom guesthouse.¹⁴

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Basildene Farmhouse is a two-storey stone house now used as a Bed and Breakfast. It is located in a small, steep valley on the south side of Wallcliffe Road, about 1.5km from the township of Margaret River and 200m east of Yalgardup Creek.

Basildene Farmhouse is built on land that falls from east to west, towards Yalgardup Creek. Although floor level and ground level are about the same on the eastern elevation, at the western side the floor level varies between one and two metres higher than the natural ground level. A western terrace, possibly replacing an earlier terrace, was built in recent times. It has views towards the valley and steps down to ground level.

Basildene Farmhouse was built in two stages. The original house was built in 1912 in Victorian Georgian style. Large ground floor extensions equal in size to the original ground floor, were built in 1980, in a style similar to the original. The construction of the original house is as follows. The floor construction consists of timber floorboards, probably on traditional bearers and stumps. The walls are of random stone. The haunched sashes of the double hung timber windows are divided into two panes each. Windows and doors have stucco surrounds.

The design of the roof is such that the ridge line is parallel to the east, north and west external walls giving the appearance of a normal hipped roof. However, when viewed from the south or rear of the building, two box gutters and three separate hipped roofs are evident. The boxed gutters run north-south and are located over the southern part of the east and west walls of the central hallway. While externally, the extensions have been largely in character with the original homestead, cement mortar was used instead of lime mortar, aluminium awning windows were used in places and concrete floors were used rather than timber.

The internal layout of *Basildene Farmhouse* is as follows. The centrally located entrance verandah is on the north side of the building, looking out onto a grassed and landscaped area adjacent to the pea gravel driveway and

¹⁰ Countryman, 23 November 1984.

¹¹ West Australia, 5 August 1987, p.68.

¹² Brochure, 'Basildene Holiday Homestead' & Augusta-Margaret River Business Directory, (Rotary Club of Margaret River, 1987), p.68.

¹³ West Australian, 5 December 1992.

¹⁴ Brochure, 'Basildene Homestead' (1995).

carpark. The centrally located front door leads directly onto the double volumed hallway, which has rooms to the east and west, and the extensions to the south. The room to the right or west of the front entrance, probably originally a bedroom, is now used as an office. The original fireplace is still in use. The room to the south of the office is a dining room, which has been enlarged by the removal of a wall. A door on the western side of the dining room leads onto a terrace which has been built in recent times. A masonry buttress has been built externally and aligns with where the removed cross wall of the dining room was once located.

The ground floor rooms to the east of the central hallway are guest rooms. Typically the guest rooms are carpeted but the north-east room has a cane or seagrass matting, a pressed metal ceiling and an original fireplace. This room was probably originally a sitting room.

The guest room to the south is accessed by proceeding through a door in the south wall of the central hallway and turning left or east. (This room was unavailable for inspection at the time of the assessment.)

The double volumed hallway has a steep staircase at the southern end leading up to a first floor gallery which is on the east, north and west sides of the hallway.

The gallery floor, ceiling and roof are supported by timber posts and beams. Capitals two thirds up the ground floor posts provide springing for arched timber beams which span between the ground floor posts and the ground floor hallway. These arched beams provide visual and probably structural support for the gallery floor above. Around the central void and to the staircase is a timber balustrade. The underside of the gallery is lined with pressed metal and the ceiling over the voids is plaster with cornices and a central ceiling rose from which hangs an electric chandelier.

There are four first floor rooms in the original house, two to the east and two to the west, all of which are used as guest rooms and probably were originally bedrooms. To the west a central first floor verandah is located directly over the ground floor entrance verandah. All four upper rooms are used as guest rooms and have carpeted floors, plastered masonry to the exterior walls and plaster on lathe stud walls to the walls dividing the rooms from the hallway. Two groups of back to back ensuites have been inserted. These rooms have mosaic tiled floors and stud walls lined with plasterboard.

The ground floor extensions are about the same area as the floor area of the original house. A doorway that was once probably an external door in the south east of the central hallway now leads directly into the new extensions.

A central corridor runs north-south with three rooms to the east and three rooms to the west. The three rooms to the east consist of two guest rooms and a kitchen, with the kitchen closest to the original structure, and having a door leading directly to the dining room in the original building. The three rooms to the east of the corridor are guest rooms.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.