



## **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**

External features which contribute to its aesthetic character include: the mellow-coloured, softly textured brickwork, with moulded brick detailing to the chimneys and door and window openings; decorative features, such as the cast iron columns, brackets, and balustrades (both the original and existing panels); and the use of elaborate cement mouldings to give emphasis to the entry porch and tower. (Criterion 1.1)

Internal features which contribute to the aesthetic character include: plaster mouldings and ceiling roses; polished jarrah and parquet flooring; ceramic flooring in the porch and billiard room; main timber and cast-iron staircase and elaborate moulded timber joinery. (Criterion 1.1)

The aesthetic quality of the house derives primarily from its scale, imposing appearance and the strong vertical emphasis imparted by the central tower and gables, two-storey verandahs, high ceilings and steeply pitched roofs. (Criteria 1.1; 1.3)

The buildings and grounds together have aesthetic values and landmark qualities and contribute to the cultural landscape of which they are an important element. The house, located high on the river bank is a landmark on the river, the impact marred to an extent by the poor development on the bank and the decline in the natural vegetation along the river edge. (Criterion 1.3)

#### **11.2. HISTORIC VALUE**

The site originally formed part of Sir James Stirling's 'Woodbridge estate', the original house on his property being erected on, what is now, the adjoining high school site. The portion of the estate purchased by Harper in 1883 was known as the 'Woodbridge Farm' and had been developed for agricultural use, including the growing of wheat, prior to that date. From the 1880s to the early 1920s, the place was the centre of the diverse business and agricultural operations of the Harper family, as well as being the Harper family home. Since that time it has housed a preparatory school under Cecil Priestley; a government home for the aged; special high school classes; and is now a National Trust historic property. This diversity of uses and occupants makes

it an important site which illustrates both human occupation and the evolution and changing nature of the region and locality over this period. (Criterion 2.1)

The property was closely associated with the establishment and early development of two important educational institutions, Guildford Grammar School, which still occupies part of the original 'Woodbridge estate', and the shorter lived, innovative 'Woodbridge House School'. Its association with Governor Stirling Senior High School in recent historical times reflects both the evolution of the locality and of secondary education in the post-World War Two period. (Criterion 2.2)

The period when the place operated as the 'Guildford Women's Home' reflects aspects of the social dislocation caused by World War Two, and has some significance as part of the history of social welfare in Western Australia during the 1940s and the 1950s. While the initial annexation of the accommodation was brought about by the crisis of World War Two, the continued use of the premises for the care of the aged for more than twenty years is a reflection both of the stringent economic situation and priorities for government spending in the post war period. (Criterion 2.2)

The property reflects the growth of the heritage movement in Western Australia in the 1960s, firstly through the initiatives of local citizens and the demolition threat and secondly as a National Trust property which is well cared for, well presented and enjoys considerable community standing. The methods used in restoration of the building and the furnishing and presentation of the house reflect the thinking of the time. (Criterion 2.2)

The place is important for its association with a number of individuals who were notable in their spheres of activity. Sir James Stirling, founder and first governor of the colony, established the Woodbridge property in the 1830s as his private country estate and is said to have used it increasingly as a retreat towards the end of his term of office. The individual having the strongest associations with *Woodbridge* was Charles Harper, who was a highly respected community leader, pastoralist, farmer, businessman, politician, newspaper proprietor and inventor. Harper's son, Charles Walter Harper, who also had close associations with the place, having grown up on the property and also managed the farming operations, was notable in rural affairs for his long term in office with the farmers' co-operative movement. Architect J. W. Wright was responsible for the design of *Woodbridge*. Wright was prominent in the architectural profession in the late colonial and early 20th century period in Western Australia. Cecil Priestley was a well regarded educator in the history of private school education in Western Australia in the early 20th century period to World War Two. He was the founder of both the Guildford Preparatory School, (which was later incorporated in Guildford Grammar School and is still in existence) and Woodbridge House School, which was one of only a small number of preparatory schools in Western Australia at the time. (Criterion 2.3)

*Woodbridge* is important for its architectural design and imposing appearance and the expression of prosperity which is conveyed. The house was unusual, if not unique, at the time it was constructed in 1884, predating houses of a similar character which were associated with the gold boom period of the 1890s. The house is notable for innovative features, i.e. tongue and groove

timber flooring; imported cast iron columns, brackets and lace work, and the use of the columns for rainwater disposal; and a highly advanced plumbing system by the standards of the day. (Criterion 2.4)

Charles Harper took a lead in the private use of artesian water; the bores on Woodbridge followed closely after the government's exploratory drilling on the Midland Junction Railway Workshop site in the early 1890s. (Criterion 2.4)

### **11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

*Woodbridge* has considerable potential as a teaching site because of the diversity and richness of the social history of the property. The house is important as part of the architectural history of the state; further studies relating to the house will contribute to the body of architectural knowledge which at present is in an embryonic state. There are numerous aspects of social history which could be explored and developed for different educational levels and for the general community. Such aspects might include the study of 19th century domestic life; private school education in Western Australia in the early 20th century; orchard and nursery practice in the late 19th century focussing on the Woodbridge Nursery; the biographies of notable people associated with the place and so on. (Criteria 3.1, 3.2)

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

*Woodbridge* is held in high esteem by the community as evidenced by the move to protect the building when it was threatened with demolition in 1964. (Criterion 4.1)

*Woodbridge* is highly regarded by members of the National Trust of Australia (WA) and is perhaps the foremost of its properties. It is popular as a tourist destination, with scheduled boat tours visiting every day of the week throughout the year. (Criterion. 4.1)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

The house is rare in Western Australia, and may be unique, for its architectural design and character in the period when it was constructed, and it pre-empted houses of a similar grandeur which were built a decade or more later during the gold boom period of the 1890s. (Criterion 5.1)

The house is unusual in that it combined the elements of both an urban lifestyle and architectural character while also being the centre of a large rural enterprise. It embodied the distinctive way of life of the Harper family and incorporated forward looking technology and innovations due primarily to the interests, personality and considerable resources of Charles Harper and to the ingenuity of the architect and builder J. W. Wright. (Criterion. 5.2)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

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### **12. 3 CONDITION**

Generally the condition of the house and coach house appears sound, however there are some problems such as recurrent fretting brickwork to the surfaces of the external walls, rising damp in some areas and cracks in the upper levels of the walls to the tower. These matters were attended to in 1995 and are being further addressed in 1996. Consequently the impact of these problems on the building fabric are becoming increasingly minor.

The condition of the mature trees has not been assessed as part of this study and should be undertaken by an expert arboriculturist.

The present condition of the jetty has not been assessed as part of this study. A report on the condition of the jetty was prepared for the National Trust by the Dept of Marine & Harbours in October 1993 in which a number of recommendations were made. These are due to be attended to in July 1996.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The original intention of *Woodbridge* is closely reflected in its current function, which as a presentation of a late nineteenth century family home, is compatible with the building fabric.

The values identified in the statement of significance can be sustained in the long term.

The building has been restored to accommodate these values and is capable of being further restored to this end. Thus it has a high degree of integrity.

The current use of the coach house is somewhat at odds with the original intention of the building.

The coach house interior has been extensively adapted over the years, first to accommodate toilets and later to incorporate a tea room and gift shop, complete with kitchen and dining areas. External paving has been added to create dining areas, thus modifying the external appearance of the building and the ground levels.

The adaptations to the building are such that they could be removed and the building could be devoted to a more compatible use. The building has a moderate degree of integrity.

## **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Woodbridge* was extensively adapted for use as the Guildford Women's Home and subsequently returned to a simulation of its original state as a result of conservation measures involving further adaptation and reconstruction. Notable amongst the introduced materials is the cast iron infill to the verandah balustrades (from the Federal Hotel, West Perth) and the spiral staircase (from the Bank of N.S.W.) The fabric of the house is considered to have a moderate degree of authenticity.

The fabric of the coach house has been substantially modified; the brickwork and joinery being essentially the remaining original fabric. It therefore has a lower degree of authenticity than the house.

The interiors of the house are furnished to give the illusion of authenticity, though a majority of the artefacts had no connection with the building or the Harper family, and the contents were introduced or reintroduced from elsewhere. Hence the presentation of the house has a moderate degree of authenticity.

The grounds of *Woodbridge* have a low degree of authenticity, due on the one hand to their greatly reduced size; the nature of development on the surrounding properties; as well as the construction of the Warden's Cottage and Garage. The adaptation of the grounds for the present uses has also resulted in the introduction of new fencing, lattice screens, modern brick paving, garden furniture, dwarf walling, parking area, jetty, and planting of trees and shrubs.

### **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

Attached are key sections of the supporting evidence prepared by Pidgeon J. and Richards O., *Conservation Plan, Woodbridge West Midland WA*, (The National Trust of Australia (WA) June 1995).

#### **13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

For a detailed discussion of the documentary evidence, refer to Pidgeon J. and Richards O., *Conservation Plan, Woodbridge West Midland WA*, (The National Trust of Australia (WA) June 1995).

#### **13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE**

For a detailed discussion of the physical evidence, refer to Pidgeon, J., and Richards, O., *Conservation Plan, Woodbridge West Midland WA*, (The National Trust of Australia (WA) June 1995).

#### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Mercer, F. R., *The Life and times of Charles Harper*, Perth, Westralian Farmers Co-operative Printing Works, 1958, reprinted 1959.

National Trust of Australia (WA), *Woodbridge Files, nos 1-4*.

Pidgeon, J., & Richards, O., *Conservation Plan, Woodbridge West Midland ,WA*, (National Trust of Australia (WA) June 1995).

For a more comprehensive bibliography see Appendix A of the *Conservation Plan*.