REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

HERITAGE COUNCIL
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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

Turner Cottage, nestled alongside the South West Highway where it crosses the Serpentine River, is an important visual component of the linear road reserve landscape. (Criterion 1.3)

Together with other heritage elements in the vicinity along the Serpentine River and the Highway, *Turner Cottage* and grounds have the potential to form a significant heritage conservation area. (Criterion 1.4)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Originally known as 'Bridge Farm', *Turner Cottage* is significant as the place where postal business was conducted in the 1860s by the Postmaster, Edward Turner, and after his death, by members of his family. 'Bridge Farm' operated as a change station for the coach for twelve years until 1887. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Turner Cottage is important in demonstrating the facilities associated firstly with subsistence farming in Serpentine and secondly with the beginnings of the postal and road transport service and system in rural Western Australia.

Turner Cottage is an example of a vernacular farmhouse successively added to before recent partial reconstruction and restoration. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The hardship endured by the Turner family has provided enduring inspiration for descendants and the wider community. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

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12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Turner Cottage is an example of a vernacular farmhouse successively added to before recent partial reconstruction and restoration. Completion of the restoration of the verandah would reinforce this value.

Turner Cottage is important in demonstrating the facilities associated firstly with subsistence farming in Serpentine and secondly with the beginnings of the postal and transport service in rural Western Australia. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

The building is well maintained in 1995 and the condition appears sustainable.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The place is presently owned and operated as a tourist facility and museum by descendents of the Turners, with a measure of family and community involvement and support. It is a starting point for possible community involvement in a wider potential conservation area including several buildings in the vicinity. Turner Cottage has the potential to flourish provided carefully structured and administered conservation policies are adopted. Completion of the reconstruction of the verandahs is seen as important in recovering the integrity of the original intentions.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Save for the replacement fabric introduced in the partial reconstruction and conservation process finished in 1980, and fabric which will require replacement from time to time such as the roof shingles, the general fabric is in its original state and should remain so.

13.   **SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

The documentary and physical evidence has been compiled by John Pidgeon and David Kelsall, Architects.

13. 1   **DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

Following a survey by A C Gregory in 1849, Cockburn Sound Location 28 was granted to Francis Fraser Armstrong in 1850. It is located on the south bank of the Serpentine River just beyond, and to the east, of Peel's 250,000 acre grant.

Armstrong, aged sixteen, arrived in the colony in 1829 with his father, by then a widower. At the age of 23, Francis married and conducted a native school at the Mount Eliza Depot with his wife. At the same time he acquired some storekeeping experience. In June 1847, he was appointed 'moral agent' and storekeeper at Rottnest Island. It is possible that the appointment annoyed Henry Vincent who, no doubt, made things difficult for Armstrong. Construction of the cottage on the island for the Armstrongs was delayed and they moved to the lighthouse for accommodation. In December 1848, Armstrong's request to be returned to Perth was granted. By then, his father and brothers were established in the Pinjarra District. Lot 28 was surveyed and granted to him.

Armstrong apparently did not settle on his 10 acre grant and, some time later, sold it to ticket-of- leave man, James Brown, for £28. Brown is believed to have built the first hut on the land. It is possible the first cottage was thatched in grass. (Coy p.68) Ownership was again soon transferred. Alfred Martin purchased the property for his sister, Elizabeth, for £65 including the improvements. At the time she was apparently a domestic servant on 'Paradise Farm' nearby. In July 1854 she married Edward Turner and it is thought they moved onto the Serpentine River property in 1856.

In 1866, Edward Turner is noted as the Postmaster at Serpentine. He grew wheat, fruit, and fodder, and produced milk and butter. A dairy was located west of the present cottage. Edward died in 1873 aged 41 yrs.

His widow continued on the farm on a subsistence basis, most probably assisted by her sons who gradually moved away. In his book of recollections, *Western Pioneers - The Battle well fought*, J E Hammond suggests 'Bridge Farm' was a changing station for the mail coach. Isobel McKay in her book indicates that the 'changing' continued between 1875 and 1887 using stables formerly in the grounds near the cottage. In addition, the family continued to operate the postal service.

The Serpentine Bridge hamlet was well placed for trade from the passing coaches until the railway line was connected to Bunbury in 1893. The township of Serpentine was later gazetted one mile west.

Elizabeth Turner died in 1902 and the property passed to her son Harry Turner who struggled on with farming until he died in 1945, in turn leaving it to his son Claude, in 1946. Claude lived and worked elsewhere, so the house was let and the land was leased. A dining room and three rooms, a bedroom, a bathroom and a kitchen had been added on the west,

with a verandah on three sides. By now, the shingle roof had been sheeted over with corrugated iron.

The cottage became overgrown and fell into disrepair until 1957 when the Shire condemned it for habitation. In the succeeding years it was vandalised. McKay notes in her booklet, "the smoke stained Baltic pine ceiling" in the dining room in 1965 when she and her husband Frank purchased the house and some of the land from Claude.

Reconstruction commenced in 1978. Chimneys, mantelpieces and some flooring were gone. The lean-to structures along the western side were removed and materials set aside for reuse. Around 13,000 new shingles were cut from sheoak for the roof of the cottage and kitchen. The kitchen was built of rammed earth. The work was completed by 1980, and the name was changed from 'Bridge Farm' to *Turner Cottage*. Other tourist facilities have been added around the site.

13. 2   PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Lot 23 of Cockburn Sound Location 28, the land on which the cottage stands, is generally rectangular with the Serpentine River flowing from east to west along the northern side.

A fence along the west separates the land containing the present improvements from the farm lands to the west. There are road reserves along the eastern and southern fence lines, the eastern road being the South West highway. There is timber bridge across the river immediately to the north east of the property.

As at December 1995, Turner Cottage comprised two small buildings. To the north a recently reconstructed three sided rectangular room of adobe construction, open to the south, comprised one building. The other comprised a four roomed cottage with limewashed external walls and a shingle roof. A simple bush pole pergola extended along the west side to represent verandahs depicted in photographs of the original cottage. Both buildings are positioned several metres from the eastern boundary.

The following data is edited from a National Trust Assessment prepared by Mr Fred Pound, an architect and member of the Built Environment Committee of the National Trust of Australia (WA), in 1988.

> The cottage is a clay brick building with a shingle roof. On site materials such as mud brick, sawn timbers and split shingles were used. The walls are single leaf clay brick bonded with river mud outside and painted with lime (limewashed). Reveal linings are limewashed brick. There is a large brick fireplace in the north room, the Parlour and in the kitchen outside coupled to an oven.

> The roof is hipped, pitched and collar tied with 4"x2" rafters at 18" centres battened and shingled; the pergola is 5'6" wide around three sides of the building with 6' high 4"x4" posts. The windows are 4"x5" post and lintel frames, 6' high, 2'6" wide.

> Doors are paneled; windows have 9 light casement sashes and are stained oregon.

> Floors: brick (and granite in places) footings with rough sawn 6"x1" board flooring on 4"x1" and 4"x2" joists bedded on natural ground.

> Ceilings are stained 6" wide pine lining boards following the rafters to 10', then on the flat.

The story of the process of conservation undertaken by the family is set out in the book *From Bridge Farm to Turner Cottage*. In 1978 the northern building consisted of brick fireplace remnants footprinting the outline of that part of the building. Sections of the roof of the main cottage were missing, and the general condition was derelict.

13. 3   REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment

References used in compiling the Documentary Evidence are as follows:

Coy, N. J. *A History of the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale* (Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale, 1984) 994.11 SER.

Erickson, R. (editor), *Dictionary of Western Australians Vol 3., Free 1850-1868* (UWA Press, 1979).

Gleeson, L. J., *A History of the Serpentine-Jarrahdale Shire* (Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale1975) 994.12 SER, BRN391000.

McKay, E. *From Bridge Farm to Turner Cottage* (Isobel E McKay, 1988) and associated references.

Richards, R. *The Murray District of Western Australia, A History*, (Shire of Murray, 1978).

Rottnest Island Assessment Files.