



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*

Mill Workers' Hall has aesthetic significance arising from its general conformity with the timber vernacular in use in the Pemberton townsite. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Mill Workers' Hall was one of the earliest community buildings in the townsite of Pemberton. (Criterion 2.1)

It is closely associated with the early phases of development of the State Sawmills and has links to the social life of Group Settlers in the region. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Mill Workers' Hall is one of the oldest buildings in the townsite of Pemberton and is highly valued by the general community as a place of social and historic significance. It is highly valued by the Pemberton community for its ongoing social, cultural and educational associations. The importance of the place to the community is demonstrated by the establishment of the Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Committee for its preservation and renovation. (Criterion 4.1)

Mill Workers' Hall contributes to the community's sense of place by providing an historic and social link with the early timber industry of the area. (Criterion 4.2)

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

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Mill Workers' Hall represents a former way of life. After construction, it became the social centre of Pemberton, being used for concerts, dances, dramatic productions and the like. *Mill Workers' Hall* demonstrates the community's way of life that is in danger of being lost. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Mill Workers' Hall is representative of its type - a simple hall built for the social needs of the residents of a timber-milling town. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

Mill Workers' Hall has been restored and is now in good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The future use of the building as a community centre is compatible with the original intention of the place and gives *Mill Workers' Hall* a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Mill Workers' Hall has high authenticity. The fabric of the building has been restored.

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

Mill Workers' Hall at Brockman Street, Pemberton, built circa 1913, is a cavernous, single-storey timber structure which was built as a hall and also served as a school.¹

European settlement in the region began when Pemberton Walcott took up grazing land there in 1862.² 'Big Brook', as the locality was originally known³, developed slowly until the establishment of timber mills there in 1912. The sawmills were to supply the sleepers for the Trans-Australian Railway.⁴ The railway engineers decreed that the best timber for the project was karri as the sleepers had to be larger and heavier than standard jarrah sleepers. One and a half million sleepers were required.⁵ The government established a network of State sawmills. Number One State Sawmill was constructed at Manjimup, known as 'Deanmill', then Numbers Two and Three Mills commenced operating at 'Big Brook' in 1913.⁶

It was at this period that *Mill Workers' Hall* was built. Originally erected to serve the purpose of a town hall, the building was erected on land donated by the State Sawmill.⁷ It was constructed by volunteer labour using donations of prime jarrah timber. Soon after completion, the land was sold to private enterprise with the hallsite being protected by a 999 year lease.⁸ By July 1914, *Mill Workers' Hall* was also in use as a schoolroom with 31 students, a situation that continued until a two roomed school was built in 1919.⁹

Mill Workers' Hall had an important social function for the community with it being the town's concert hall, playhouse, dance hall and ballroom, Red Cross blood bank, wedding reception venue and meeting centre.¹⁰ An early

¹ Letter from Paul Omodei re Pemberton Mill Hall; Chronology of Events - Pemberton, from notes supplied by K. Rogers of the Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Committee; *West Australian*, 10 May 1994, p.35; Morris, J. & Underwood, R. *Tall Trees and Tall Tales; Stories of Old Pemberton* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1992), p.26. There is some discrepancy with dates. Some sources say the 'Mill Hall' was built as early as 1910, others as late as 1914. It was in use as a school as early as July 1914.

² DOLA: Geonoma database entry.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Morris, J. & Underwood, R. *Tall Trees and Tall Tales; Stories of Old Pemberton* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1992), p.4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p.26; *West Australian*, 29 December 1994, p.3; Chronology of Events - Pemberton, from notes supplied by K. Rogers of the Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Committee.

⁸ *West Australian*, 29 December 1994, p.3.

⁹ Morris, J. & Underwood, R. *Tall Trees and Tall Tales; Stories of Old Pemberton* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1992), p.26; Chronology of Events - Pemberton, from notes supplied by K. Rogers of the Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Committee.

¹⁰ *The Paper, Pemberton-Northcliffe Community*, No.34, February 1994; *West Australian*, 16 December 1993; Photograph of Duke of Gloucester visit 1946, 'Inside Mill Hall', photo supplied by K. Rogers, Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Committee & Morris, J. & Underwood, R. *Tall Trees and Tall Tales; Stories of Old Pemberton* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1992), p.26

resident of Pemberton, Elizabeth Wellburn, recalled the significant role of the hall.

We had no musical instruments whatsoever until one neighbour sold us an old gramophone and a few records. That's when I taught Bob to dance from waltzes to the two-step. When we went to the Pemberton Hall we really enjoyed the dancing. It was our only pleasure as we couldn't afford the cost of the fare to the pictures.¹¹

At a time when the township of Pemberton was thriving, *Mill Workers' Hall* was central to the social and entertainment needs of the Pemberton residents.

Another important function of *Mill Workers' Hall* was as a cinema venue. The development of cinema impacted on society in Western Australia during the interwar years. The attraction of the cinema was demonstrated during the period of 1925-1939 with the import of 463 full length feature films into Australia.¹² The travelling picture show man brought film exhibitions into the rural regions of the State as early as 1911, with operators such as Jack Bignell, Allen Jones and Paddy Barker. Initially they travelled around their circuits showing films in temporary venues such as the local town or church halls. As the demand for film entertainment grew, permanent venues were established.¹³

Mill Workers' Hall became the temporary venue in Pemberton for the exhibition of films. Allen Jones, a South-West mill worker, developed an extensive picture show circuit soon after the Group Settlement Scheme commenced in the region. His round included Yornup, Boyup Brook, Wilga, Julikup, Greenbushes, Pemberton and Northcliffe.¹⁴ *Mill Workers' Hall* was used as a venue for his films until a dispute arose between Jones and the Mill Hall Management Committee. When Jones found that his picture shows were being cancelled and replaced with alternative hall bookings in 1929, he built the Pemberton Picture Theatre as a solution to the dispute.¹⁵

In 1961, the State Saw Mill at Pemberton was sold to Hawker Siddeley Ltd and the hall lease transferred. Nine years later, Hawker Siddeley sold out to Bunning Brothers.

By 1993, *Mill Workers' Hall* had deteriorated significantly as described in a newspaper article.

Elizabeth Wellburn, 93, remembers seven decades of social life at Pemberton community hall - but the future of the historic building is less certain for the young ballet students she meets now. Plaster is cracked and timbers are affected by a badly leaking roof. Locals have begun fund-raising to fix the roof, the most pressing problem, though the building does not belong to them. 'Even so,' says Kaye Rogers, co-ordinator of fund raising, 'we are not going to stand around and watch a building which has meant so much to so many fall down.'¹⁶

¹¹ Wellburn, E. *Elizabeth and Bob: A Story of Group Settlement in the Pemberton Area, Western Australia* (Pemberton, WA, c.1984), pp.14-15.

¹² Bell, M.D. *Perth, A Cinema History* (The Book Guild Ltd, Lewes, Sussex, 1986), p.8.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 96-97.

¹⁵ Ibid & Morris, J. & Underwood, R. *Tall Trees and Tall Tales; Stories of Old Pemberton* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1992), pp.26-28. The Pemberton Picture Theatre Hall still exists.

¹⁶ *West Australian*, 16 December 1993; 'Manjimup Shire Council Report', 24 November 1994.

The importance of *Mill Workers' Hall* to the Pemberton community was demonstrated by the setting up of the Pemberton Mill Hall Restoration Fund.

In March 1994, the Manjimup Shire Council agreed to accept vesting of the building after a Department of Land Administration inquiry.¹⁷ Most of the hall land was vested in the State Government, but the hall and a small portion of the land belonged to Bunnings. Bunnings objected to the proposal, forcing the Council to rescind its resolution. Nevertheless, the Council wanted the building to be included on the State Register of Heritage Places to ensure that Bunnings maintained it in a reasonable condition.¹⁸

By August 1995, a compromise was reached in which Bunnings agreed to relinquish ownership of the hall and contribute a promised \$30,000 towards its restoration. The land is now under the control of the Crown¹⁹ and the hall has been restored. Once a Management Plan has been approved it is planned to vest the site in the Pemberton Progress Association.²⁰ The battle to save *Mill Workers' Hall* is an indication of its ongoing value to the community.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Mill Workers' Hall is a single-storey, timber framed building, containing a main hall and a lesser hall. It is located on the south-west side of Brockman Street, south of the railway line and north of Swimming Pool Road. Opposite is the Forest Industries Centre, across the railway line to the north is a cafe and to the south-east are houses, which are situated on the north-west side of Swimming Pool Road. *Mill Workers' Hall* is characteristic of the town of Pemberton and generally conforms to the jarrah timber vernacular used in the townsite.

Mill Workers' Hall is not built to any style and consists of a gabled main hall, aligned at right angles to the street, so that the long axis runs north-west to south-east. A smaller gabled hall, located parallel and to the south-west of the main hall, is set back further from the street. The visitor enters the main hall via a small vestibule. Leading off the main hall and to the south-west of the vestibule is a small kitchen with a servery. On the other side of the vestibule, but entered from the street, is what appears to be a storeroom. Access to this room was not available at the time of the physical assessment. Toilets to the north-west corner and adjacent to the storeroom are entered from the main hall. At the opposite end of the main hall is a stage, beyond which is a backstage area and a toilet. Access to the lesser hall is by means of double doors located near the stage.

The main hall is about 10 metres wide and 22 metres long, not counting the timber stage, which is about 750mm higher than the floor level of the main hall. The hall has a timber floor and the walls consist of timber panelling to a height of about 1.5 metres above floor level, over which are plaster on lathe walls. This is continuous around the hall, interrupted only by door openings.

¹⁷ *Warren-Blackwood Times*, 11 May 1994.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 14 December 1994.

¹⁹ Crown Land Record Vol. 3103 Fol. 504, DOLA.

²⁰ Ibid, 2 August 1995 & telephone confirmation from David Smith, DOLA Land Officer, .on 16 October 1997.

In the corners of the main hall, leading up to the stage and at right angles to the main axis of the hall, are a pair of matching timber steps. Adjacent to the steps the top of the panelling rakes. At the stage the panelling is continuous and about 1.3m high.

Surmounting the panelling to the main hall, along the two long walls and the wall near the main entrance, is a timber shelf about 200mm wide, which is supported on timber brackets at about 600mm centres. The walls above dado height in the main hall consist of plaster on timber lathe. Diamond shaped vents are located in the walls. Externally at these positions are metal cowls to prevent the ingress of rain water. The ceiling of the main hall is slightly curved, the curve being achieved by eight equally wide facets which run parallel to the long axis of the hall. The vertical distance between the top of the ceiling and springing point of the ceiling is about 300mm.

The main hall and stage appear to have been built first. A number of alterations and additions appear to have taken place shortly afterwards as follows:

Extensions to main hall - The tongue in groove floorboards in the main hall are typically about 90mm wide. However, from about 2 metres from the Brockman Road end to the front of the building the floorboards are about 110mm wide. The line where the transition occurs corresponds externally to a double stump detail and also to change in paint colour on the south-eastern elevation. This indicates the hall was enlarged, and the vestibule, front kitchen, store and front toilets added.

Adding of lesser hall - The diamond shaped wall vents of the main hall are also located in the wall dividing the main hall from the lesser hall, indicating that the lesser hall is an addition. The lesser hall is also detailed differently; the timber dado is lower and does not have a shelf over, the wall vents are of a different design in an art deco style, and the timber cover strips to the ceiling are simpler.

Adding of backstage area - The detailing of the walls and ceiling are similar to the lesser hall, indicating that they were built at the same time. This area has undergone a number of alterations. Originally it was divided in half, with each half having its own side access, presumably for male and female performers. A large opening in the central dividing wall was subsequently formed, judging by the atypical floorboard under the opening. Other alterations include the installation of a chimney and a slow combustion stove, kitchen benches, a sink and a servery to the lesser hall. At the rear is a verandah which was common to the lesser hall and part of the backstage area. The part of the verandah adjacent to the backstage area has been enclosed and converted into a rear toilet and a small room leading on to the lesser hall back verandah.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.