



## 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 \*

The creative use of a vernacular material - antbed mixed with spinifex - for a civic building is most unusual. (Criterion 1.2)

The place is the only remaining vestige of the built environment of the original township and therefore is a notable landmark. (Criterion 1.3)

The remaining structure contributes to the aesthetic qualities of the landscape by providing a significant impact in the picturesque setting of the natural environment. (Criterion 1.3)

#### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The place is the only substantial remnant of the original Halls Creek townsite gazetted in 1894. (Criterion 2.1)

The ruin and the original Halls Creek townsite are associated with the first discovery of payable gold in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

The place was an important component in the linkage provided by the overland telegraph system connecting Halls Creek to the world. It is evidence of the establishment of communications infrastructure to remote areas of the State necessitated by the gold rush. Its function as a telegraph and post office was an essential community service. (Criterion 2.2)

The place is associated with the emergency operation performed by Postmaster Tuckett in 1917 and the subsequent establishment of the Australian Inland Mission hospital at Halls Creek and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. (Criteria 2.2, 2.3)

#### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The site has considerable potential to contribute to the future study of the archaeology of a remote early township. (Criterion 3.1)

The ruin has the potential to contribute to knowledge regarding the method of construction and the qualities of the construction material. (Criterion 3.3)

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\* 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.

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

The place is highly valued by the Halls Creek community as the largest remaining structure in the Old Halls Creek township. (Criterion 4.1)

The ruin is of considerable sentimental importance to the community and contributes to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

#### **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

The ruin is an endangered antbed structure. The extent of usage of this material for walling is not known. (Criterion 5.1)

##### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

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##### **12. 3 CONDITION**

The place is in poor condition. The building was in continuous use until c. 1960. The subsequent removal of the roofing material contributed significantly to the deterioration of the remaining fabric. National Trust recommendations for the stabilisation and long term survival of the place have not been implemented. Immediate conservation management could prevent further deterioration.

##### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The place has low integrity. The original Post Office function is not evident and is unlikely to be recoverable.

##### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

Although the removal of the roof structure and subsequent significant deterioration of the fabric affects the authenticity of the place, the place has high authenticity.

#### **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Tanya Suba, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Taylor, Architect.

##### **13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

*Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins*, the ruins of a single-storey building of mud brick construction, was built for the Public Works Department in 1889.

In 1879, Alexander Forrest's expedition opened the Fitzroy and Ord Valleys for pastoral settlement. Forrest headed north, discovering the Oscar and King Leopold Ranges, passing immediately north of Halls Creek, naming Mt Barnett and the Ord River and he reported on the excellence of land for cattle grazing and the possibility for gold discoveries. Forrest's report attracted the interest of prospective pastoralists and over the next few years large pastoral leases were taken up in the Kimberley by people such as the Buchannans, Duracks, Bridges, MacDonalds, and Emanuels.

In 1883, John Forrest explored and surveyed the Kimberley District. Accompanying him was the Government Geologist, Edward Hardman who

prepared a geological map and report of the auriferous potential of the area. The following year Hardman accompanied H. F. Johnston when he undertook further survey and triangulation work of the Fitzroy River valley towards what was to become the town of Halls Creek. A small amount of fine alluvial gold was found along the Elvire, Panton and Ord Rivers.

Attracted to the area by these finds, in August 1885, Charles Hall and his partner John Slattery discovered gold in the vicinity of the old Halls Creek townsite and subsequently claimed the Government reward for discovering the first payable gold in Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> This discovery initiated the Kimberley goldrush and within a year of this gold discovery about 3,000 people were 'combing the spinifex-covered hillsides and stony gullies' around Halls Creek.<sup>2</sup> Between 1885 and 1887, 10,000 people, mainly men, arrived in the Kimberley intent on finding gold.<sup>3</sup>

On 19 May 1886, a Government Gazette notice proclaimed the Kimberley Goldfield. That same year saw the Kimberley goldrush peak with hopeful prospectors coming to the district from far and wide. In 1887, the digger population at Halls Creek was over 2,000 but beginning to dwindle as much of the alluvial and workable gold was removed. The Kimberley goldrush was over by 1889, although some small mining operations continued in the area.<sup>4</sup>

The settlement of Halls Creek was established on the banks of the creek which was also named after Charles Hall. Although initial surveying and development of the townsite commenced in 1887, the townsite was not gazetted until 23 November 1894.<sup>5</sup>

The need to provide for improved communications in the remote Kimberley region was recognised by the Colonial Government and in 1888, 'the sum of £60,000 was provided for the erection (or construction) of a Telegraph Line from Derby to the Goldfields and thence to Wyndham'.<sup>6</sup> Mr W. Atkins was awarded the contract for the erection of the first section to Derby at the rate of £38 10s per mile and Mr A. B. Wright was awarded the contract for the other section between Hall's Creek and Wyndham at £32 10s per mile. The PMG Annual Report of 1889 states:

Mr Atkins completed his contract on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1889, but the line is still in the possession of the Works Department owing to the non-erection, completion, and equipment of the various station buildings without which, of course, the line cannot be maintained. I have, however, rendered all the assistance I could, and upon the subsequent completion of the Hall's Creek station building, placed an operator there at the expense of this Department to endeavour to keep up communication - imperfect it is true - with the limited aid of a field instrument; the proper instruments, battery material etc unfortunately not having been ordered from England.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Battye, J.S. *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia* Cyclopedia Co. Adelaide, 1912-1923, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Farwell, George *Ghost Towns of Australia* Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Shire of Halls Creek: A proposed development strategy*, Department of Regional Development and the North West Kimberley Office, March 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet.

<sup>5</sup> National Trust Assessment Exposition, 03/09/1984 & Kelsall, David. 'Heritage Assessment for the National Trust of Australia (WA) of The Post Office Old Hall's Creek' Perth, February, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Postmaster General's Annual Report, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* Atkins was an active builder throughout Western Australia.

Although construction of the Post Office was completed in late 1889, it was not gazetted as a Post Office until March 1891, and as a Post and Telegraph Office until 1 September 1892.<sup>8</sup>

The telegraph line and its associated buildings, including the Halls Creek Post Office, were built by, and initially under the control of, the Public Works Department. As such, Mr Ottoway, the first Telegraph Officer stationed at Halls Creek operated the line for firstly the Public Works Department and, when the Post Master General's Department assumed control upon its completion, for that department.<sup>9</sup>

A major setback to the successful completion and operation of both sections of the Telegraph Line was the 'unsuitability of the wire with which the line was constructed - the wrong gauge having been given by the Public Works Department when ordering it from England'. The 'flimsiness' of the wire, which was constantly breaking, caused almost continuous interruptions along the line.<sup>10</sup> The line was subsequently 're-wired with iron wire'; however the section between Halls Creek and Wyndham was not complete and operational until 1893.<sup>11</sup>

A description of Halls Creek in 1898, describes the town and its buildings:

Hall's Creek is the official and business centre of the Kimberley Goldfield, and has a population of about 50 inhabitants. The public buildings consist of a residency, post and telegraph office, court-house, gaol, police station, and hospital. The building of new police and warden's quarters was commenced during 1897. It is connected with Perth by telegraph.<sup>12</sup>

As the Kimberley goldfields declined, to be taken over by the Murchison and Coolgardie goldfields, Halls Creek was maintained by the growth of pastoralism, the town becoming the centre of a large and ever growing pastoral industry.

Control over the operation of the Halls Creek Post Office was assumed by the Commonwealth on 1 January 1901. In July 1905, the classification of the Post and Telegraph Office at Halls Creek was raised from Grade XIII to Grade IX to include service on behalf of the State Government in the capacities of Resident Magistrate, Warden and Mining Registrar.<sup>13</sup>

On 13 October 1908, the tender sum of £708 was accepted by Contractor J. Jacoby to undertake repairs of the Post Office building. Other repair contracts in Hall's Creek listed at the same time suggest the possibility of cyclone damage.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Howell, Steve 'Hall's Creek Post Office and Telegraph Line', 1979, p.1. (PR13417) Please Note: Howell's article refers to Colonial Secretary's Office Files 1989/1889, 2833/1889, 2846/1889, 2925/1889, 1187/1890, 2003/1890, 1000/1891 and 1914/1892. Unfortunately the main files on the Hall's Creek Post Office, 2969/1888 - Telegraph Office at Hall's Creek - advise erection of, and 1718/1889 - Erection of Post and Telegraph Office at Hall's Creek, have been destroyed.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Archives, Acc No K1, Item No - Box 1/216/90: Telegraph Operation Halls Creek, 1890.

<sup>10</sup> Postmaster General's Annual Report, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Postmaster General's Annual Report, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Bursill, Harry Oliver *Souvenir of the Postal Telegraph and Telephone of Western Australia*, also referred to as 'Christmas Souvenir', 1898, p.32. (Rare Book Section, Battye Library).

<sup>13</sup> Australian Archives, Acc K1, Item - Box 16/2514/05: Approving that the Classification of Hall's Creek Post Office be raised, 1905.

<sup>14</sup> PWD Contract Book 1, 3506s, CAMS.

In August 1917, the Postal and Telegraph Master, Mr F. W. Tuckett had to perform emergency surgery on stockman, Jimmy Darcy, who suffered internal injuries in a horse accident. Tuckett, who was also the Halls Creek Resident Magistrate, Warden, Commissioner of Roads, Chairman of the Licensing Board, Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths and Protector of Aborigines, performed the necessary surgery in the Post Office building using a pen-knife and razor and following instructions relayed by telegraph messages from Dr J. Holland in Perth, who faced a 12 day journey to reach Halls Creek.<sup>15</sup> Darcy died of malaria several days after the operation and was buried in the Old Halls Creek cemetery. This event was used by the Reverend John Flynn to highlight the lack of medical care in isolated areas of Australia and was partly responsible for the establishment of the Halls Creek Nursing Home by the Australian Inland Mission, and in 1927, the establishment of the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the Kimberley Region.<sup>16</sup>

Cecil Kelly, who worked in Halls Creek in c. 1931, recalls the Old Post Office building as being whitewashed on the outside. He remembers the building having narrow double entry doors to the post office section which occupied the middle room. There was a residence on the western end and one room was used as a courtroom until it was relocated to the Shire. Behind the building were three stables and 'an old dunny'.<sup>17</sup>

Up to 1938, the Postmaster, in addition to his postal duties, filled the position of Clerk of Courts, Mining Registrar, Warden, Bailiff and other State Government positions, and carried out these extra duties in the two rooms on the eastern side of the Post Office building which are also referred to as the Courthouse. In 1938, the Police Department took over all the State Government positions and transferred the activities from the Post Office to the Police Station.<sup>18</sup>

In 1946, consideration was given to the construction of a new Post Office building two blocks to the east of the existing building. Although preliminary plans were prepared the proposal was abandoned when the Post Master was advised that a new Halls Creek townsite was to be established nearby.<sup>19</sup>

The need for a reliable water supply and inaccessibility due to flooding was a major reason for the original Halls Creek townsite being gradually abandoned from the late 1940s and a new townsite being gazetted in 1948.<sup>20</sup> In addition, a number of the government buildings were in poor condition and required considerable expenditure for ongoing use as indicated in correspondence concerning the old townsite:

As far as the buildings are concerned, many of them are in the last stage of deterioration, particularly the Post Office and Quarters, and Police Station.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *The Inlander*, No. 19, October 1927, pp. 85 & 87.

<sup>16</sup> *Nugget News*, 1986, Vol. 1, No. 5, p.10; Farwell, G. *Ghost Towns of Australia* Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, p.229 & *The Inlander*, No. 19, October 1927, pp. 84 & 89.

<sup>17</sup> Oral History interview with Cecil Kelly by Michael Adams, 1982/3, OH540, pp.251-3.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Archives, Acc K273/44, Item 1956/108: Halls Creek Post Office Disposal, c. 1956.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Archives, Acc K273/44, Item 1946/58: Halls Creek New Townsite, New Halls Creek Post Office.

<sup>20</sup> Kelleher, P. *Historic Buildings of the Kimberley Region of WA*, 1988, p.153 & National Trust Assessment Exposition, 03/09/1984.

<sup>21</sup> Australian Archives, Acc K273/44, Item 1946/58: Halls Creek New Townsite, New Halls Creek Post Office.

The years 1952-53 marked a key transition for the new town, located 16km to the west adjoining the airstrip, with a number of buildings being relocated from the original townsite and new buildings being constructed.<sup>22</sup> The Post Office transferred to its new premises in the new Halls Creek townsite on 3 June 1952. Subsequently approval was given for the old Post Office building to be rented on a weekly basis at £1 per week to Mr R. Shaw Moody, who was prospecting in the district with his wife, Beryl. Meanwhile, moves were made towards the disposal of the building which included an initial offer to the Moola Bulla Native Station to purchase the building materials for salvage purposes for £150. At this stage the building was in need of extensive renovations and had considerable termite damage.<sup>23</sup>

In 1954, Mr Moody took over the Hotel in the old Halls Creek townsite and vacated the Post Office building. At this time there was an unofficial Postmaster, Mr R. B. Morrow, who conducted the Post Office and telephone switchboard in a room at one end of the building. Mr Morrow sought approval from the Postmaster General's Department to become the tenant of the building but his request was denied. In June 1954, tenders were called for the purchase of the building which was jointly owned by the Commonwealth and the State and subsequently Mr Moody's tender of £320 was accepted. The Old Halls Creek Post Office was one of the few sites in the old township to revert to private title in this process.<sup>24</sup>

The Old Halls Creek Post Office building was subsequently used as a General Store, including a sub-branch of the Post Office until 1956. Operated by Kimberley Enterprises, the store remained in use until c. 1960 when the business was relocated into the new Halls Creek townsite. Since that time the Old Halls Creek Post Office has remained unused.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the buildings in the old Halls Creek townsite were either relocated or recycled for building materials, and *Old Hall's Creek Post Office Ruin* apparently lost its roof soon after being abandoned. It is believed that the corrugated iron roofing material was reused at the Balgo Mission, which also secured the iron roof from the Old Halls Creek Police Station.<sup>26</sup>

In 1975, an architect, Mr Bruce Tomlinson was commissioned by the National Trust of Australia (WA) to prepare a report with costings for an initial stabilisation of the ruin. The Report's recommendations included the installation of a hipped 'parasol' roof constructed clear of any of the remaining walls to protect them from further weathering. The plan did not proceed.<sup>27</sup>

In 1977, the Old Halls Creek Townsite was entered onto the list of recorded places by the National Trust of Australia (W.A.) and on 3 September 1984, *Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins* was classified as a ruin.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Op Cit, Kelsall, David.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Archives, Acc K273/44, Item 1956/108: Halls Creek Post Office Disposal, c. 1956.

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

<sup>25</sup> Conversation by Tanya Suba with Derek Keene, 6 June 1997 & Owen, G.E., *The Post, Telegraph and Telephone Offices of Western Australia*, August 1958.

<sup>26</sup> Conversation by Tanya Suba with Benny Bridge, 16 July 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Tomlinson, B. *Post Office and Old Town Remains, Hall's Creek, Western Australia: Report on Existing Conditions and Recommendations for Further Action*, Perth, June, 1975, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> National Trust Assessment Exposition, 03/09/1984.

The Old Halls Creek Townsite, including *Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins*, is a tourist attraction for the area. The only other major traces of the original township are two remaining corners of the Police Station, the Cemetery, some concrete floor slabs including that of the hotel, stone drains and culverting and other minor concrete and stone remains.

*Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins* is presently owned by Libby Taylor who bought the property with her husband, Sandy, now deceased, from Beryl McGuire, previously Moody.<sup>29</sup>

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Old Halls Creek is a picturesque former town located between several small watercourses which flow in the wet season. *Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins* is the only remnant building of the old town that is readily visible, exempting the cemetery.

*Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins* is located at the north side of the old town, and fronted prominently on to the road alongside the Creek. Documentary photographic evidence indicates that the building was roofed in corrugated iron on timber framing, with several gables incorporating ventilators. The generous surrounding verandah roof was set at a flatter pitch than the main roof, and provided protection both to the occupants from the strong sunlight and to the vulnerable walls from the rain of the wet season.

The building plans previously measured and drawn illustrate 600 mm thick external and 400 mm thick internal walls. The joinery was of timber, although very little of this material now remains (July 1997). Stone was used for sections of flooring, portions of this material can be seen where not covered by mud deposited from the wall deterioration. Slate was used for fireplace mantles and for end-on arch decoration at the fireplaces, and this material is still readily apparent. The walls have now deteriorated to the extent that they are an average height of perhaps 1.5 metres. An estimate of the height of the walls in a 1977 National Trust assessment photograph could place the walls at about 2.5 metres high. It is not difficult to picture an accelerated decline now that the timber framing material to openings has been lost, and that in another twenty years only a mound of material covered by vegetation will remain.

An assessment of the place in 1994 notes:

The walls are alleged to have been constructed from ant bed bound with spinifex. As to whether the walls were constructed from blocks cut from ants nest, and wetted and remoulded, or alternatively laid direct as blocks cannot be determined without further research. ... What is very evident, however is that the material was laid in beds with distinctive horizontal coursing probably resulting from either a slightly varying block moisture or density, size of block, or source from different ant hills. A less dense block may compress more in the wet season. What is important, however is the strong banding of the coursing in the base material. The building was not scrutinised to determine if additions had been made, nevertheless evidence of additions was not detected.<sup>30</sup>

The 1994 assessment also notes:

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<sup>29</sup> Conversation by Tanya Suba with Libby Taylor, 16 July 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Kelsall, David 'Heritage Assessment for the National Trust of Australia (W.A.) of the Post Office Old Halls Creek' February 1994.

The last vestiges of plaster in several small areas on the external walls were still extant at the inspection. The extent was perhaps limited in area to several square cms only.

No external render or plaster was readily visible at inspection in July 1997, although several areas (particularly at internal corners) of harder smooth 'plaster' the same colour as the walls was visible inside the ruins of the building.

It is difficult to classify the style of *Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins* without original drawings to reveal further the nature of the detailing, however the timing is Victorian (c. 1840 - c. 1890) in Australian classification<sup>31</sup> and the detailing likely to be so austere as to be simply termed 'rustic'.

### 13. 3 REFERENCES

Bursill, H.O., *Souvenir of the Postal Telegraph and Telephone of Western Australia*, also referred to as *Christmas Souvenir*, 1898 (Rare Book Section Battye Library).

Kelleher, P. *Historic Buildings of the Kimberley Region of WA* 1988.

Kelsall, D., *Heritage Assessment for the National Trust of Australia (WA) of The Post Office Old Hall's Creek* Perth, February, 1994.

Owen, G.E., *The Post, Telegraph and Telephone Offices of Western Australia*, August 1958.

Tomlinson, B. *Post Office and Old Town Remains, Hall's Creek, Western Australia: Report on Existing Conditions and Recommendations for Further Action*, Perth, June, 1975.

*Nugget News*, 1986, Vol 1, No 5, p. 10.

PMG Annual Reports 1889, 1890, 1891.

PWD Contract Book 1, held at the CAMS Tender Office.

National Trust Assessment Exposition, 03/09/1984.

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet, 11/03/1991.

### 13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further information may be found in the files at the Australian Archives; however at the present time access is restricted to information pre December 1966.

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<sup>31</sup> Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.