



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.14.2 Using Australian materials in construction
- 5.8 Working on the land
- 8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 104 Land allocation and subdivision
- 602 Early settlers

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The nature of the cob is clearly expressed in the house, through the uneven wall thickness and surfaces, and in the irregular door and window openings, giving it a distinctive vernacular aesthetic.¹ (Criterion 1.1)

Chittering Park Homestead has a strong vernacular aesthetic in its rural landscape setting, farmyard layout and in the design and execution of the cob walled house. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Chittering Park Homestead, through its combination of modest vernacular buildings and modified landscape setting, illustrates the earliest European settlement of this particular regional area and its importance as an early,

* 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 and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

¹ For details on 'cob' construction, see the Comparative of this assessment. 'Vernacular' architecture refers to buildings that are neither designed by an architect nor professionally constructed.

continuous and successful fruit growing region of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

Chittering Park Homestead relates strongly to the period when convict labour was introduced into the Colony, with many ticket-of-leave men employed at the place. (Criterion 2.2)

Chittering Park Homestead is associated with George Sewell, a significant local landholder in the area from the 1850s to the 1870s. (Criterion 2.3)

Chittering Park Homestead has historic value as an example of the use of cob walling in Western Australia – a technique that was still commonly used in parts of England in the 19th century and promoted in technical literature for colonial settlement, but relatively rarely used in this State. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Chittering Park Homestead has the potential to reveal archaeological information about agricultural practices in the 19th century. (Criterion 3.1)

As a rare local example of a cob building, *Chittering Park Homestead* has the ability to yield information about the method of constructing cob walling – a distinctive earth building technique with strong vernacular traditions originating in England, but relatively rarely used in Australia. (Criterion 3.3)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Chittering Park Homestead has social value as a place that was highly valued by the local community as a venue of social interaction and entertainment provided by the Pickett family. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The house at *Chittering Park Homestead* is rare as an example of a building constructed using cob as its building material, not only in the context of Western Australia, but also Australia wide. (Criterion 5.1)

The house at *Chittering Park Homestead* is representative of vernacular buildings of its type and age (in terms of plan, form and lack of embellishments), but such buildings are becoming increasingly rare. (Criterion 5.1)

Chittering Park Homestead is comparatively rare as a modest, vernacular mid-19th century farmhouse that has retained a very high level of integrity and authenticity. Other comparable homesteads of this period have usually had a greater degree of alterations and/or extensions, or have been abandoned and are now in a ruinous state. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

In terms of simple vernacular homesteads of the mid-19th century, the form of the house as a main core laid out around a central hall, with enclosing verandahs and 'verandah rooms' under a broken-back roofline, represents one variation of a common theme. (Criterion 6.1)

The place demonstrates the principal characteristics of a rural landscape modified for farming and fruit growing practices in the 19th and early 20th century. (Criterion 6.1)

The relationships between the house, farm shed complex, former worker's cottage (ruin), other farmyard elements (such as stock loading ramps), the

Brockman River and the general landscape setting, demonstrate the principle characteristics of a functional 19th century farm. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Overall, *Chittering Park Homestead*, including outbuildings and gardens, is in a fair to poor condition.

The house is in fair condition, although having being vacant for a number of years the level of maintenance is now low. The localised deterioration of the cob walls is likely to accelerate without remedial works to address the small number of serious cracks and areas of severe fretting. A regular maintenance regime will be required to minimise rising and falling damp, with particular reference to the condition of the roof, roof plumbing, site drainage and the need to keep the area immediately abutting the walls clear of dense vegetation. There is also some minor visible evidence of localised termite damage.

The informal house garden is in a fair condition. Although there is evidence of a low level of maintenance, some elements are now overgrown and neglected. Of particular concern is the Japanese Pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) in the rear yard, which is an invasive suckering species that is creating a dense thicket, which is likely to reduce the values of the garden and may impact on the physical fabric of the house and outbuildings.

The Shed Complex and Bridge are in a poor condition with partial collapse of the timber framing to both, plus loose, rusted and missing roof sheeting to the Sheds.

Ongoing maintenance on the house and other structures is essential to, at least, stabilise them in their current state.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Chittering Park Homestead demonstrates the original intention of its construction and use, despite being unoccupied since 2003.

The simple nature of the structures at *Chittering Park Homestead* means that restoration of the identified values would be a relatively straight forward process. The associated fittings and fixtures as well as furnishings relating to its use and occupation which are an integral part of its identified values could be readily interpreted, restored and meaningfully displayed within the setting of the place. *Chittering Park Homestead* has a high level of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The fabric of *Chittering Park Homestead* is essentially in its original state or readily demonstrates the changes to the fabric over time that are of equal value to the original structure.

Chittering Park Homestead has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Helen Burgess, Historian, and Annette Green, Architectural Heritage Consultant, in February 2008, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Chittering Park Homestead, Bullsbrook, located at 1136 Chittering Road, on Lots 32 and 36, comprises a portion of the entrance drive, the bridge over the Brockman River, the cob house set in a small, enclosed garden (which also includes a concrete block toilet, concrete block generator room, timber tank stand and stone tank stand), the farm shed complex, a chimney remaining from a former worker's cottage, other farmyard elements (such as stock loading ramps), and mature olive, citrus and pine trees.

Chittering is located 80km north-east of Perth in the Shire of Chittering at the foot of the Darling Range and with Brockman River (formerly Chittering Brook) as the main watercourse. 'Chittering' is thought to be derived from the Aboriginal word 'Chitta-Chitta' meaning 'place of the willy wagtails'.²

Although the first title deeds for the Chittering area were issued in the early 1840s, to William Locke Brockman and George Fletcher Moore, neither of these landholders settled in the area.³ It was not until the 1850s that the first European settlers began to establish homes and work the land in Chittering.

Between 1850 and 1869, Western Australia experienced an increase in demand in the agricultural sector, which was supported by the introduction of convict labour at this time. In Chittering, a notable surge of land interest occurred between the years 1860-69. During these early years of settlement, Chittering developed as an agricultural district, initially with livestock, hay (chaff) cutting, as well as some fruit growing, although this was to become a more predominant industry after the turn of the century. The early settlers, including George Sewell, John Spice, John O'Neil and Henry Morley, all took up large land grants and pastoral leases to take advantage of the profits to be made from agriculture and the suitability of the land at Chittering for hay and fruit. Many ticket-of-leave men were employed to work on their properties.

George Sewell arrived in Western Australia in 1834 at age 18 with his brother, John. His parents, John (snr) and Anne and his other siblings came later in 1841. George and John came initially to share-farm on leased properties in the Avon Valley.⁴ In 1853, George Sewell first took up a pastoral lease on land in the Chittering area and continued to extend his landholdings in this area, as did other settlers, through the 1850s and up to the 1860s. His holdings included Swan Locations 198, 573 and 1352, which were located in Lower Chittering and upon which Sewell established a property he called 'Gartsford'.⁵ Here, Sewell built a cob house, later named *Chittering Park Homestead*.⁶ Gladys Tucker, who was born in the house, wrote:

In the 1850s it was built, with ten big rooms and verandahs two.
Tis made of pug, straw, mud and all, and walls as thick as a kangaroo,
It's very cold with ceilings high, and once the shingles were beneath the iron.⁷

² Pollock, Graham, *Chitta-Chitta... Valley of Citrus*, Chittering Valley Progress and Sporting Assoc. (Inc.), 1987, p. 2.

³ Pollock, *Chitta-Chitta*, p. 1.

⁴ Erikson, Rica, *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians, pre 1829-1888*, UWA Press, 1988, p. 2771.

⁵ Erikson, *Dictionary*, p. 2770. Note: Erikson lists the Chittering property as 'Spring Valley'; and *Certificates of Title*, Vol. 1458, Fol. 991 & Vol. 1723 Fol. 530.

⁶ The house is said to have been built by a Mr Warren, verified by a 'W' stamped in one of the rear walls. Although the consultants identified this marking, the interpretation is contained in only one source, which offers no references for further verification. See Pollock, *Chitta Chitta*, p. 9.

⁷ Gellard W, *Chitty Chatting About Chittering: Stories of the Old Times*, Chittering, 2006, p. 3.

The dates for the construction of *Chittering Park Homestead* in local history sources vary from 1850 to 1858. However, a July 1855 report by Magistrate Harris includes a reference to Sewell's homestead:

At 6pm, following the Chittering Valley, I came upon the farm of Mr Spice... Mr Spice however, stated that his house was full... Under the direction of his son I proceeded through his wheat field towards the homestead of Mr Sewell.⁸

Although Harris does not give a name to Sewell's property, it is likely that it was *Chittering Park Homestead* as no other homesteads were recorded as being established by Sewell in Chittering.

Sewell was predominantly an absentee owner as he also had land at Champion Bay and Greenough where he spent most of his time and to where he eventually permanently settled. He employed a number of ticket-of-leave men to work his Chittering property.⁹ Bruce Buchanan states that Sewell employed a former ticket-of-leave man, Edmund Byrne. According to Buchanan, Byrne started working for George Sewell in 1860 at 'Spring Valley'. This property was described as being 'in the valley of the Brockman River, probably in what is now the Shire of Swan, but possibly on one of the detached properties in Lower Chittering which made up the farm'.¹⁰

[It] is possible Edmund was appointed there as farm 'manager' particularly as he had early experience of clearing, fencing and bringing land into productive use. Edmund and Amelia's first two children were probably born on part of the Spring Valley property...¹¹

Sewell retained some landholdings in the Chittering area even after he left in the late 1860s, but by 1880 he had divested himself of all of them and his attentions were focused on his property 'Sandsprings' at Greenough.¹²

After Sewell gave up his holding at *Chittering Park Homestead*, the property is reputed to have been acquired by a Mr Anderson and then Mr Theo Lowe.¹³

In 1905, George Squire Berkley (Squire) Pickett purchased the Lower Chittering property.¹⁴ Pickett, according to the family descendents and local history sources, was responsible for renaming the property 'Chittering Park'; a name it retains to the present day.¹⁵

Squire Pickett was born in England in 1862 and arrived in Western Australia c.1876. In 1886, he married Alice Maud Liddlelow and had three children: Eva, Walter Berkley (Berkley) and Augustus (Gus). Pickett originally worked as a

8 Extract of report taken from Pollock, *Chitta-Chitta*, p. 1.

9 Buchanan, Bruce, *Chittering: From Exploration to Shire*, Perth, 2000, pp. 35 & 36.

10 Buchanan, *Chittering*, p. 44.

11 Buchanan, *Chittering*, p. 44. Only two references have been located that refer to 'Spring Valley', and as Sewell had many leaseholdings and freehold land in the Chittering area, it is not certain that Spring Valley is *Chittering Park Homestead*. Graham Pollock (*Chitta Chitta*, p. 3) states that the name 'Spring Valley' was given to the property by the subsequent owner, Mr Anderson.

12 Buchanan, *Chittering*, p. 44; and notes from Battye Library Private Archives listing MN0003, Acc 485A, 2902A and 4897A.

13 Pollock, *Chitta-Chitta*, pp. 3-4. Unfortunately the source of this information was not referenced. Because of the complex nature of these landholdings, an historic title search has so far not revealed any information pertaining to the ownership or leasing of *Chittering Park Homestead* property by Anderson or Lowe. Erikson, *Dictionary*, pp. 40-45 contains several Andersons that were farmers in the area: David James Anderson, Joseph Anderson and Robert Anderson. A Theodopholis Lowe is also listed, but there is no proof of him being at Chittering.

14 Hand-written notes by Gus Pickett, Battye Library Ephemera Collection, reference PR8679/BUL/6.

15 Pollock, *Chitta-Chitta*, p. 4.

butcher in East Perth, Bayswater, then Bullsbrook and Chittering. He was also an original member of the Bayswater Road Board.¹⁶

Squire Pickett is reputed to be the first to plant orange trees in the Chittering area, and some of the extant citrus trees at *Chittering Park Homestead* date from 70 to 100 years old.¹⁷ In 1914, the *Swan Express* described a visit by its correspondent to *Chittering Park Homestead*:

On passing along we soon arrived at Mr Pickett's farm and orchard, comprising about 60 acres of crop, which is looking fairly well, and a large area of orchard consisting of over 800 orange and lemon trees.¹⁸

The first Lower Chittering School was located a mile from Chittering Park Homestead, on Lot 26, then part of George Pickett's land:

On passing through the Park gate the first thing to notice is the pretty little school that has just been completed... I understand that the erection of this school is mainly due to the efforts of Mr F. Kendall, and that the land was given by Mr Pickett.¹⁹

This small school operated until a new hall was built in another part of Lower Chittering in the 1921 and which served also as a school. The original school building at Chittering Park was then relocated to South Chittering.²⁰

In 1915, Berkley married Edith Good. After his marriage, Berkley and his wife continued to live with his parents at *Chittering Park Homestead* and they had three girls, Hazel, Brenda and Gladys.²¹

In the mid 1920s, the property was split between Squire Pickett's two sons, Berkley and Gus. This course of action may have been taken by Squire after the death of his wife, Alice, in 1921.²² The first time Berkley and Gus appear in the *Post Office Directories* was 1927, with Berkley listed as a farmer and Gus as an orchardist and both of Lower Chittering.²³ Berkley stayed on at *Chittering Park Homestead* but Gus, who was also married by this time, established his farm to the north of the property, building his own home and working his own orchard, with his property named 'Chittering Park'.²⁴

In addition, stables, no longer extant, were once located to the north of the shed complex. Also on the property was a small worker's cottage, located just north-east of the shed complex. This may have been constructed in the 1920s but, according to Lyle Tucker, grandson of Berkley Pickett and son of Gladys Tucker (nee Pickett), it was not inhabited from the 1960s. The cottage had asbestos walls (although this may not have been the original fabric) an iron roof and brick chimney.²⁵ The cottage fell into disrepair and the chimney and remnants of the floor are all that remain of this cottage today.

¹⁶ Erikson, *Dictionary*, p. 2486.

¹⁷ Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

¹⁸ *Swan Express*, 11 September 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Swan Express*, 11 September 1914, p. 8.

²⁰ Hand-written notes by Gus Pickett, Battye Library Ephemera Collection, reference PR8679/BUL/6.

²¹ Erikson, p. 725.

²² Erikson, *Dictionary*, p. 2486.

²³ *Wise's Post Office Directories*, 1927, microfilm, Battye Library.

²⁴ Erikson, *Dictionary*, p. 725.

²⁵ Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

Around 1940, a generator room was constructed – near to the rear of the house – of concrete block, the same material used to build Gus’s house.²⁶ In 1950 a water closet was constructed in the same location. The same brick mould Gus had used for his house (1932) was used to make the bricks for both these buildings.²⁷

In 1946, Squire Pickett died.²⁸

Berkley Pickett continued to live at *Chittering Park Homestead* until 1958 when he retired to Guildford, and the Homestead was transferred to Berkley’s daughter, Gladys May, and her husband Harry Tucker. Gladys was born in the house in 1924, in what is the main bedroom.²⁹

From the time *Chittering Park Homestead* was owned by the Pickett family, and later the Tucker family, it operated predominantly as an orchard, although some sheep were also kept on the property. The citrus fruit was traditionally sold at the city markets (formerly at Wellington Street).³⁰

The other significant plantings located at *Chittering Park Homestead* are the mature olive trees, however these are believed to be older than the citrus trees and, according to Lyle Tucker, are likely to have been planted by the previous owners to Pickett. The olives were not harvested by the Tucker family, although the Tuckers have permitted some local Italians to come and pick the olive fruit for their personal use. The other dominant introduced tree close to the house is a Japanese Pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), which, according to Lyle Tucker, was planted by his mother, Gladys, in the 1950s.³¹

The original entrance drive to the property was via a ford across the Brockman River on the southern boundary of Lot 32, continuing around the olive trees to the back of the house, which was then used as the entrance to the homestead. Later a bridge was built over the river on the northern boundary which serviced the two properties of Gus and Berkley Pickett. The extant bridge was constructed 1946-47 by Berkley Pickett and Harold Tucker.³²

Lyle Tucker recalls the house being little changed from at least the 1950s to what is there today, and with the use of the rooms being what they always were. Originally there was no ceiling in the main living room, and the plaster ceiling was added by Berkley in the 1930s/40s. This room was also curtained off for many years to form additional sleeping areas for the Pickett family. However, when it was no longer required for bedroom space, this room was used for large parties and social gatherings, with many members of the local community, family and friends attending and Gladys providing the entertainment on the piano which was kept in the room. The family used the room off the kitchen more as their private sitting/living room.³³

26 Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

27 Correspondence, Wendy Logue to HCWA, 30 June 2008.

28 Erikson, *Dictionary*, p. 2486.

29 Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

30 Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

31 Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

32 Correspondence, Wendy Logue to HCWA, 30 June 2008.

33 Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

In 1977, Lyle Tucker built a family home on Lot 36, and continues to work the orchard, of which there is approximately 30-40 acres. The orchard trees formerly located to the front of the house have been removed.³⁴

After the death of Harry Tucker, Gladys Tucker continued to live in *Chittering Park Homestead* until 2003. The house is currently vacant.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Chittering Park Homestead is located off Chittering Road approximately 11km north-east of the Great Northern Highway, Bullsbrook. The entrance drive leads off Chittering Road and across the Brockman River, but the timber bridge is in an advanced state of disrepair and access is now via a farm track from Lot 36.

The *Chittering Park Homestead* site comprises a portion of the entrance drive, the bridge over the Brockman River, the cob house set in a small, enclosed garden (which includes a concrete block toilet, concrete block generator room, timber tank stand and stone tank stand), the farm shed complex, a chimney remaining from a former worker's cottage, other farmyard elements (e.g. stock loading ramps), and mature olive, citrus and pine trees.

The general rural setting comprises farm paddocks dotted with self-seeded olive trees and eucalypts, while in the immediate vicinity of *Chittering Park Homestead* there is a relatively dense band of mature trees to either side of the house (running across the slope, roughly parallel to the river). This informal landscaping includes olive trees, eucalypts, Japanese Pepper trees (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), orange trees, one large pine tree (adjacent to the farm sheds) and a wide range of smaller shrubs and trees within the house garden. The effect of this dense planting, together with the native vegetation lining the Brockman River, is to screen *Chittering Park Homestead* from public views. The house garden now has a low level of maintenance and there is extensive suckering of the Japanese Pepper tree, creating a dense thicket in the north-eastern corner of the rear yard.

House

The house is a simple vernacular building of no particular architectural style. It is located on an elevated, sloping site overlooking the Brockman River, with ground level entry at the rear and a set of six steps to the front porch.

The house has a simple rectangular plan form under a high-pitched, short-sheet corrugated iron hipped roof (painted red). The main roofline extends over the central core of three main rooms and then continues at a lower pitch over a narrow ring of outer rooms and verandahs. The southern and central chimneys have been removed to below the roofline, but the brick kitchen chimney remains at the northern end. Ogee gutters remain to some sections, but have become dislodged in a number of places. Otherwise, the roof appears generally weather-proof (with a small number of replacement sheets). Evidence of an earlier shingled roof remains beneath.

The walls of the house are of cob, with an uneven surface that has been covered with a soft render and finished with what appears to be a lime-wash and later layers of paint. Where measured, the thickness of the walls varies between 330 and 450 mm and there is considerable unevenness both in plan and elevation. The surface render also varies in thickness (measured examples ranged between 3 and 15 mm), but while this achieved a surface suitable for painting, it did not in

³⁴ Lyle Tucker, phone conversation, 10 March 2008.

anyway conceal the unevenness of the underlying structure. In general the walls have a plain finish, both internally and externally, but the Hall has been simply ruled to imitate ashlar stonework. In the Store there are marks on the wall that appear to have been made by stock brands when the render was still damp (inclusive of the letter 'W'). The majority of the walls appear sound, but there are a number of areas of localised deterioration (ranging from minor to severe), including fretting due to rising damp, fretting due to falling damp, and settlement cracking. Where the render has fallen away, the clay and straw mix of the cob is clearly visible.

There is a stone foundation to a portion of the north-western corner and under part of the front verandah but, from a non-invasive visual inspection, the walls generally appear to have been built directly onto the ground. Similarly, the floor joists appear to have been laid directly on the ground, and the floor levels vary slightly between some of the rooms (indicating that while the ground level was built up it was only roughly levelled prior to construction). For example, from the Living Room there is a step down to Bedroom 3, no change in level to Bedroom 4, and a slight step down to the Hall.

Within the central core of the building is a large Living Room (7.3 x 4.9m) to the south of the entrance Hall, with two rooms to the north – Bedroom 1 (6 x 4.2m) and the Sitting Room (6 x 2.8m). Additional narrow rooms wrap around the north and south ends of the central core, forming 'L' shaped rooms at the north-western and south-western corners – Bedroom 1 and the Bedroom 2. These flank a central front verandah, which is approximately 2.8m deep x 9.8m long. What appears to have originally been another 'L' shaped room to the south-eastern corner of the house has been divided into two, with a rough infill panel of cob separating what is now Bedroom 4 and the Laundry/Bathroom. The infill is rougher and thicker than the other cob walls and is also distinguished by the creation of arched niches with timber shelves (two shelves to bedroom 3 and five to the Laundry). The base of this wall is faced by a concrete plinth and there is severe fretting immediately above this level. At the north-eastern corner of the house there are two original rooms – a Kitchen and Store. The Store and Bathroom flank a central rear verandah, which is approximately 2.7m deep x 5.1m long. The posts to both the front and back verandahs are approximately 115mm square at the top and bottom, chamfered to an octagonal shape for the main section. On the front verandah there is a plain flat timber balustrade and a set of concrete rendered steps. On the back verandah the initials TPR, with the letter H above and the letter A below, have been neatly carved into one of the posts. The layers of paint in the carved area suggest that this was added at an early date.

Within the Living Room, a pink finish through to the top of the wall (above the ceiling joists) is visible where the current ceiling has partially collapsed, indicating there was previously either no ceiling or a higher ceiling in this area. The lower pitched roof over the outer ring of rooms was lined with lapped boards (still in situ), but there is no evidence of this finish under the steeper pitch of the central core. The ceilings now include plasterboard and batten – with a decorative central panel (Living Room), beaded boards (Hall, Bedroom 1 and Sitting Room), pressed metal (Bedroom 3), panel and batten (Bedroom 4, Kitchen, Store and Bathroom), and lapped boards (Bedroom 1, Laundry and Verandahs). The ceilings have no cornices in the 'lesser' rooms, a convex plaster cornice in the Living Room and convex timber cornices in the Hall, Sitting Room and Bedroom 1.

The floors also vary with wide (130-170mm) butt-jointed boards to the Living Room, Bedroom 2 and Back Verandah; narrower (86-115mm) butt-jointed boards to the Hall, Store and front Verandah; and concrete floors to the Kitchen and Bathroom/Laundry. The other floors are fully covered by linoleum or carpet.

There are two main types of doors, the most basic of which are made with butt jointed boards of varying widths, with either two or three ledges supported on long, face mounted hinges. The other type dates from the inter-war era, and these are of a three panel high-waisted style (four panel to Bedroom 1). The latter are used in the main living areas and hallway. A variety of fly screen doors have been fitted to all external openings and to the doorway between the Hall and the Sitting Room. The door frames have very basic detailing and uneven members to adapt to the variations in the cob wall openings. Saw marks indicate bush carpentry for many of the simple timber elements. The height of the door openings measured ranged from 1720-2100mm (with the majority less than 1900mm) and some have uneven head heights – all reflecting variations in the levels of the cob lifts when the walls were being constructed. Clear widths range from approximately 760-970mm.

Windows are generally single casement, with double casements to the front façade. However, there is little consistency in their size or the number of window panes. This even applies to the front façade where the window to Bedroom 1 has eight panes to each casement, while the window to the Living Room has only three. The other detailing to these two windows (lintels, sills, framing and mullions) is matching and it is not clear why an identical pair were not used.

All of the original wall openings have sills and lintels built into the cob walls.

Other joinery includes a wide range of simple skirtings; a simple Colonial style fireplace surround in Bedroom 1; an interwar era timber and tile fireplace in the Sitting Room; and deep, grooved chair rails in the Sitting Room and parts of the Kitchen. Plain fireplaces (with no fireplace surrounds) are located in the Living Room, Bedroom 1 and the Bedroom 3, while the Kitchen has a Meters No. 2 Stove with a faux brick finish the chimneybreast. The Sitting Room fireplace appears to have been created by cutting into the back of the fireplace to Bedroom 1 and realigning the throat to serve the new hearth (blocking the chimney off from Bedroom 1).

Evidence of structural alterations includes the infill panel between Bedroom 4 and the Laundry/Bathroom and a blocked-up door opening between Bedroom 2 and Kitchen. It is possible that the latter was a former door opening that has been filled in with a cob panel, however, the lack of a timber lintel and the relative neatness of the panel to the cut edges suggests that it is more likely to be an unfinished attempt to create a new opening (eg. cut through, but without the cob wall removed). There is also clear evidence of a major redecoration of the living areas in the interwar era and the creation of a serving hatch between the Kitchen and Sitting Room. The fit out of the Bathroom/Laundry is a staged 20th century adaptation and includes a brick copper, cement lined shower, hot water service, bath and basin.

Other than as noted above, the place appears largely original. It also appears to be generally sound, but the localised deterioration of the cob walls is likely to accelerate without remedial works to address the small number of serious cracks and areas of severe fretting. A regular maintenance regime is also required to minimise rising and falling damp (with particular reference to the condition of the roof, roof plumbing, site drainage and the need to keep the area immediately

abutting the walls clear of dense vegetation). There is some minor visible evidence of localised termite damage, while small holes and movement indicate that the floor boards and/or joists have deteriorated in Bedroom 1 (floor currently covered with linoleum).

Garden and Outbuildings

The house garden is enclosed with a timber framed chicken wire fence, with pipe framed gates providing access from the front, rear and side yards. The garden is very informal with common garden plantings such as geraniums, hibiscus, roses, succulents, ornamental vines, a grape vine, and a pencil pine. The dominant feature is the mature Japanese Pepper tree that has suckered densely in the north-eastern corner of the back yard. The Western Australian Department of Agriculture has identified this as an invasive species that suckers vigorously – noting that removal of the suckers, pruning of the tree or root damage only encourages more vigorous suckering.³⁵

The remains of a former stone tank stand are located on the northern side of the house and in the rear yard there is a tall timber tank stand (in a deteriorated condition). Also the in rear yard is a concrete block toilet and a concrete block generator room.

A short distance from the enclosed house garden (to the north and south) there are very large, mature olive trees, some of which may date from the early phase of development. A number of mature orange trees are also located around the outside of the enclosed house garden, together with mature eucalypts.

Farm Sheds

Approximately 20m behind the house (to the east) there are a series of interconnected farm sheds laid out in an irregular shape under separate rooflines. The interiors and the eastern facade were not accessible at the time of inspection, but the shed complex has clearly evolved in an ad-hoc fashion with additions and repairs undertaken using readily available materials. The timber framed walls are now clad with a variety of materials including vertical corrugated iron, flat metal sheets, vertical butt jointed boards, vertical lapped boards, and horizontal corrugated iron. The more protected eastern face is open fronted and a mixture of bush poles and sawn timber framing is visible. The whole of the shed complex is in a dilapidated condition with partial collapse of the timber framing in some areas, plus loose, rusted and missing roof sheeting.

In the immediate vicinity of the shed complex there is the remnant of a simple stone chimney (part of a former worker's cottage), plus stock loading ramps, water tanks and other farmyard elements. A large pine tree at the southern end of the Shed Complex is the only significant landscape element.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Cob buildings

Cob (also known as 'pug' or 'mud and straw') was a traditional building method in a number of areas of England. The consistency of the cob and the method of construction varied in different locations, but in general the main materials (loamy or clay soil, plus hay) were put into a trench with water and then trodden into a malleable mixture by horses, oxen or human feet. Walls of 400-600mm thick were

³⁵ Department of Agriculture Garden Note No 19 – suckering trees that become a nuisance (July 2004, reviewed October 2006).

raised on a foundation of stonework, in layers of reducing thickness (called rises) that were trodden down and left to settle before the next layer was added. The excess cob was either pared off with a flat backed spade as each rise dried, or as a single operation once the wall was completed. Timber lintels were put in as the work progressed, but the openings were cut out and framed after the work had settled – noting that a considerable amount of shrinkage could be expected as the walls dried out. The walls were plastered after they had been allowed to fully dry. There are a number of variations to this technique, including the addition of small stones or cow dung, and the use of local vegetation in place of hay. One less common variation included the use of shuttering, being distinguished from pise by the inclusion of organic materials in the mixture.³⁶

One contemporary Western Australian description of the technique was outlined in a letter written by George Egerton-Warburton:

The material ... is known here by the name of 'Devonshire Cob'. It is frequently spoken of contemptuously by the inexperienced as 'mud-walling' but of all the building materials which I have seen used in this part of Australia, it is the cheapest, the most comfortable and the most capable of receiving ornamental openings. Part of my own house is built of it [St Werburghs, Mount Barker, 1846]...

Having built with stone the foundations and the walls to a height of one foot above ground, you tread up brick earth or good loam, or both together. We generally tread with cattle adding water ... and shaking in chopped straw. This mixture when properly tempered is laid with 4-pronged forks all over the stone to the height of from 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet at a time according to the drying capability of the weather. In a building of any size by the time you have gone all round it is dry enough to bear another course. It is laid a good deal wider than the wall is intended to be when finished and from time to time as it becomes the right consistency for operation the walls are pared with a sharp instrument to g.... and beaten smooth with a tool like a gigantic plumber's mallet. If you wish to make the best work regardless of trouble you carry it up solid without an opening and after proper time allowed for consolidation and thorough drying according to the season you trace yr. openings with charcoal on the walls and cut them out. Arches, round, pointed, or any pattern without crumbling or any precautionary measures whatever.³⁷

Avenues for the dissemination of information about this building technique not only included exponents such as George Egerton-Warburton, and migrants from those parts of England where it was traditionally used, but also technical information such as a detailed description in Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*. Loudon particularly noted that:

We think that there are many farmers, especially in America and Australia, who, if they knew how easily walls of this description could be built, would often avail themselves of them for various agricultural purposes.³⁸

Despite this recommendation, the use of cob in Australia has not been widely recorded, either in the documentary evidence or as extant examples.

³⁶ Green, A L, *Unfired Earth Walls – the Promotion and use of Sod, Sun-dried Brick, Cob and Pise Walling in New South Wales from 1788 to 1960*, Project Report for the Master of the Built Environment (Building Conservation), University of New South Wales, 1989.

³⁷ This is from the copy of George Edward Egerton-Warburton's letter to his brother Rowland, dated 26.4.1870 (Battye ref 1179A).

³⁸ Loudon, J C, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*, 1869 (first published 1832/3, revised 1846), detailed description of cob building, p. 417. Note: Loudon gave the source of this description as *The Peasants Voice* (1830), but according to research undertaken by J McCann in England, that was actually a repeat of an article published in *The Cambridge Chronicle* in 1821.

Examples of cob and other earth buildings

Only a small number of cob buildings have been identified in Australia through documentary evidence or extant examples.

St Werburghs, Mount Barker

In Western Australia, the only other example that has been clearly described was an 1846 house built by George Egerton-Warburton at St Werburghs, Mount Barker. This house is no longer extant, but the surviving farm buildings do include a mud walled blacksmiths shop. The *Conservation Plan for St Werburghs Farm Buildings* concludes that the blacksmiths shop 'has mud walls, the same material as that used for the homestead which was completed in 1846'.³⁹ The Conservation Plan describes the blacksmiths shop as pise construction, but the photographs of the exposed walls do not reveal evidence of rammed layers or putlock holes. The use of the term pise for solid earth walling is not uncommon but, described correctly, pise actually uses earth and small stones with no organic material and is always raised as rammed layers between temporary shuttering. Given the description of cob walling provided by George Egerton-Warburton (above) it therefore appears likely that the St Werburghs' blacksmith shop is another extant Western Australian example of a cob farm building.

South Australia

Documentary evidence has confirmed that by the late 1840s a considerable number of cob houses had been erected in South Australia. Several examples of this type of building were recorded by the South Australian Centre for Settlement Studies as part of research and field work undertaken in c.1980, including Cornish miners cottages and a large cob house, barn and stables built by an immigrant from Devon.⁴⁰ The latter is a c.1843 farm complex known as Gumbank, which is located in the Adelaide Hills. Here, the two-storey house, the barn and the stables are all constructed with cob walls resting on a 600mm-high stone base.⁴¹ In this case the cob buildings are more substantial than the house at *Chittering Park Homestead*, the walls were more carefully parged and the house was fully rendered and ruled as imitation ashlar. However, not dissimilar to *Chittering Park Homestead*, 'the formality of the façade was... detracted from by the inexactness of the location, and of the shape, of the openings within it'.⁴²

Victoria

Detailed research has not been undertaken for the purpose of this assessment, but it is understood that at least isolated examples of cob buildings have been recorded in Victoria.⁴³ One well-known example is Bear's Castle which was constructed at Yan Yean in c.1846 probably by two men – Hannaford and Edwards – who had arrived separately from Devon, England.⁴⁴ It was

³⁹ Pidgeon, J and Laurie, M, *Conservation Plan for St Werburghs Farm Buildings Mount Barker*, prepared for Grey and Jenny Egerton Warburton, February 2003, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Green, A L, *Unfired Earth Walls – the Promotion and use of Sod, Sun-dried Brick, Cob and Pise Walling in New South Wales from 1788 to 1960*, Project Report for the Master of the Built Environment (Building Conservation), University of New South Wales, 1989, p. 37.

⁴¹ Young, Aueuckens, Green & Nikias, *Lobethal 'Valley of Praise'*, A Heritage Survey carried out for the South Australia Department of Environment and Planning by the South Australian Centre for Settlement Studies, 1983, pp. 176-179.

⁴² Young *et al*, *Lobethal*, p. 177.

⁴³ Lewis, M, *Victorian Primitive*, Greenhouse Publications, Victoria, 197, pp. 39-427.

⁴⁴ Heritage Victoria website – www.heritage.vic.gov.au.

constructed for an early pastoralist, John Bear, and is a two storey structure, roughly square in plan and occupying an area of less than 12 square metres. A somewhat quirky building, it was designed to resemble a fortress, with a pyramid shaped roof, pointed arched openings, and turrets at each corner – one with a stair and another in brick and stone with a chimney. It was not designed as a farmhouse, and may have been used as a lookout for monitoring livestock or forest fires (also being occupied briefly by a manager of John Bear's estate, and his family occupied in c.1865).

New South Wales

Detailed documentary research undertaken in the mid 1980s identified only one 19th century description that could be verified as a cob house (Sutton Farm, Uralla, c.1877) and another less certain reference to mud huts in a mining camp near Bathurst.⁴⁵ Another property, Wardell near Bathurst (c.1878), was reported to be extant in 1987 and the description of this place noted that 'For the most part the walls are uneven and although they have been plastered the plasterer has not been able to eliminate the bumps. The general appearance is closer to mud-brick than pise, but from the [quite specific oral history] description must be cob'.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the other four extant examples of cob houses identified through fieldwork were all more recent – being built in the Bathurst-Orange region during the early to mid 20th century.

Other Earth Buildings

A review of the Census of the Commonwealth of Australia – Detailed Tables and Statisticians Reports for 1911 has identified data that provides a general understanding of the use of pise and sun-dried brick in Western Australia at that time.⁴⁷

In 1911 a total of 6,333 sun-dried brick dwellings and 1,975 pise dwellings were recorded by the Australian census (as specific buildings types under a question regarding the materials of the outer walls of all occupied buildings). Of these 1,554 sun-dried brick dwellings (approximately 24%) were located in Western Australia, while only 17 pise dwellings were recorded for this state (approximately 0.86%). This suggests that while earth buildings were not altogether uncommon (sun-dried brick representing 2.3% of the total number of occupied dwellings in Western Australia in 1911), solid earth walled dwellings (cob or pise) were very rare.

Other Mid-19th Century Rural Homesteads

A number of other modest rural homesteads dating from the mid 19th century have been entered in the State Register of Heritage Places. Examples of some of the places that were of a comparable modest scale at the time of construction, and which are recorded as having retained much of their original character, include:⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Green, A L, *Unfired Earth Walls – the Promotion and use of Sod, Sun-dried Brick, Cob and Pise Walling in New South Wales from 1788 to 1960*, Project Report for the Master of the Built Environment (Building Conservation), University of New South Wales, 1989, p. 106.

⁴⁶ Green, *Unfired*, p. 106. Quoting correspondence from E Howard, Eltham, Victoria, dated 22.6.1987

⁴⁷ Green, *Unfired*, pp. 28, 33, 34, 39 & 40.

⁴⁸ Brief historical and descriptive notes sourced from the Heritage Council's Registration and Assessment documentation for each place.

Abbey Farm, Yallingup (00426): The first house on this property was constructed in 1864. This simple vernacular building has timber-framed walls with brick infill, lined externally with vertical timber planks. The broken back hipped roof has been shingled. The only direct similarities with *Chittering Park Homestead* are the simple vernacular style, rectangular plan form and low door heights.

Cowalla Homestead Group, Cowalla (01088): The Homestead of *Cowalla Homestead Group* is described as a good, intact and substantial example of Colonial Georgian style residence constructed in 1850. It has some similarities in material with *Chittering Park Homestead* (in the general context of earth buildings). However, it is representative of the much more commonly used mud brick rather than cob.

Ellensbrook Farmhouse, Margaret River (00115): This vernacular farmhouse was built in the 1850s. Constructed partly of wattle-and-daub, and partly of vertical laths and battens, it contains driftwood spars in the roof structure. The modest scale of the place is comparable with *Chittering Park Homestead*, however the materials and character are quite different.

Hassell Homestead, Kendenup (02262): This mid 1850s homestead has foundations of local stone and 450mm sun dried brick walls made from local clay mixed with straw. A more substantial two-storey house was erected nearby in the late 1860s. The construction of a new house at such an early date demonstrates a different evolution of the farm complex than that at *Chittering Park Homestead*.

Moondah Homestead, Mooliabeenee (03721): Moondah Homestead was constructed in Flemish bond brick during the 1850s. The living quarters of the house consist of a central core of three rooms interconnected with single doors. The central core is surrounded by a 3m wide lean-to roof, which is enclosed along the northern side.

Southampton Homestead, Southampton (00710): Southampton Homestead was constructed in 1859. It comprises a modest, single-storey brick house with a detached kitchen/bakery, both constructed in the Victorian Georgian style. It has been described as having mud brick walls, but the size and texture of the masonry units confirms that it is almost certainly under-fired brick rather than sun-dried.

Westbrook Homestead, Vasse (05372): Westbrook Homestead is a simple, c.1865 Victorian Georgian building, constructed of soft-fired bricks, laid using English bond coursing, with a verandah to all four sides. The internal plan features a central passage with two rooms on either side. A further room is accessed from the main living room or via the rear verandah and there is a separate, detached kitchen.

Conclusion

The available evidence suggests that the cob house at *Chittering Park Homestead* is a rare vernacular building type with regards to its building material, not only in the context of Western Australia, but also Australia wide.

In terms of simple vernacular homesteads of the mid-19th century, the form of the place as a main core laid out around a central hall, with enclosing verandahs and 'verandah rooms' under a broken-back roofline, represents one variation of a common theme. Less common is the relative lack of alterations and extensions and the consequent high level of authenticity of the place. Many other modest homesteads of this period were altered and enlarged over time or replaced by more substantial residences.

13. 4 KEY REFERENCES

Green, A L, *Unfired Earth Walls – the Promotion and use of Sod, Sun-dried Brick, Cob and Pise Walling in New South Wales from 1788 to 1960*, Project Report for the Master of the Built Environment (Building Conservation), University of New South Wales.

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Some investigation could be made into the part of England that George Sewell came from to determine if there might be a link with his choice of cob construction for his house. Some further investigations could also be made to ascertain whether Sewell engaged someone else with traditional associations with cob to build the house.

A more detailed historic title search in conjunction with a search of rate books may reveal more information on any owners between Sewell and Pickett, identified here as possibly Mr Anderson and Mr Theo Lowe.