



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES- ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council of Western Australia in September, 1991 have been used to assist in determining the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1. AESTHETIC VALUE

Alma School is a simple, practical building, well sited and planned with architectural sensitivity to environmental issues. The building addresses the fields through the elongated southern windows and is provided with shade by the overhanging tree branches. (Criterion 1.2)

The siting of the building on a rise under a tree creates a welcoming visual impression on the landscape. The rustic nature of its construction complements the open landscape and the trees provide contrast in colour and form. The building has a strong verticality and the dark timber provides a pleasant massing in the open fields, giving the school a sculptural quality. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Alma School is important as a place which illustrates the provision of educational services to the Mid-West region of Western Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Alma School is valued by the local community as a place where educational and social activities have taken place for nearly eighty years. (Criterion 4.1)

Alma School is valued by the local community as evidenced by purchase of the place by the local residents in 1956, its ongoing maintenance and later restoration, in 1988, and by the continued use of the place as a community venue and meeting place. (Criterion 4.1)

Alma School contributes to the sense of place and historical identity in the community. People associated with the place are commemorated in lists and plaques on display. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Alma School is important locally, and regionally, as one of the remaining 'one teacher' schoolhouses in the district. It demonstrates a form of educational institution, which is no longer common in the State. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2. REPRESENTATIVENESS

Alma School and its remaining classroom furnishings, is representative of the style of single rooms schools built during the first half of the twentieth century in rural Western Australia. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3. CONDITION

Alma School is in excellent condition. The building has been maintained in a manner sympathetic to the conservation of its cultural heritage significance. Repairs done in 1974, 1975 and 1988 have ensured the building has been well maintained. Electricity was provided to the building in 1989.

12.4. INTEGRITY

Alma School has a high degree of integrity. The current use of the place, as a community centre, is sympathetic to the original intent of the place and assists the viability and sustainability of the place within the community.

12.5. AUTHENTICITY

Alma School has a high degree of authenticity. There has been little intervention in the original fabric of the building. The provision of electricity to the building has not diminished the authenticity of the place.

The sealed tennis courts and associated structures are not original but illustrate the evolution of use of the place as a community facility.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Alma School was constructed in 1914 and 1915 by contractors Turner & Smith and opened for classes in 1916.

The establishment of a school at Alma was first requested by four local farming families through the Northampton School Board on 16 May 1904. This was primarily because of the distance (between 7.2 km and 12.9 km) that their sixteen school-aged children, and six younger children, had to travel for schooling in Northampton. The Northampton School Board inspector met with the applicants on 15 June 1904. A formal application to the Northampton School Board was made on 6 July 1904 and the Minister for Works informed the Colonial Secretary, 'that children in the Victoria District were growing up without school education. A school, he stressed, was

urgently needed in the Alma Agricultural Area, at a point seven to eight miles north of Northampton'.³²

In 1905, a timber classroom and teacher's quarters, also known as Alma School, were erected on the Geraldine-Northampton Road at Udandarra Brook. In 1910, the building was relocated to a site near the existing building. The school's first enrolment was twelve students. By 1913, enrolment had reached eighteen students. By April 1914, enrolment was thirty students and the Northampton School Board applied a new classroom, a shelter shed and an "A" class standard teacher's quarters. The Education Department notified the Board on 29 June 1915 that a standard room for fifty pupils and the erection of a shelter shed would be complete by 4 November 1915. The new *Alma School* building, to which this report refers, accommodated its first pupils in 1916, and the earlier building was used as housing for the teacher until after 1948, although it was demolished prior to 1959.³³

In 1926, the Commissioner of Public Health reported on 25 September 1926:

'...There is one class room, tidy well ventilated, well lighted and in good order. There is a corridor-cloak room tidy and in good order. Two lavatories, - good order. Shelter shed, - tidy. Closets and urinal: These are kept clean by the boys who are appointed for that purpose. This procedure is to be commended. Gardens are a credit to the school'.³⁴

Alma School continued in use, with little modification, until the 1950s. A former student described the building of the 1940s thus:

'..the main classroom had nine double desks to accommodate eighteen children, although during my years the enrolment was usually about twelve to sixteen children... Fifteen permanent blackboards lined the walls. In one corner of the room was a large cupboard containing the Education Departments "free stock"... An open fire-place in another corner of the room was lit up on cold days'

The verandah had:

'rows of hooks on one side for hanging coats, hats, school bags, towels and drinking mugs. At one end there was a bench with two wash basins. The Education Department provided a canvas cylindrical water bag which held about three gallons (14 litres). During summer one of the pupils had the daily duty of filling the water bag from one of the two rain water tanks outside.'³⁵

In 1946, the 'Alma Community Centre' was founded to give support to the school and local community activities. Between 1950 and 1956 this body operated as the 'Alma P & C (Parents & Citizens) Association'. In August

³² Gable, W., *Rural & Isolated Schools - The Development of Western Australia, School: Alma, Shire: Northampton*, (booklet, no publishing details) p. 4. The Alma School was not the only school in the area: other one-teacher schools in the Northampton region included East Bowes, Isseka, Sandy Gully, Yallabatharra, Ogilvie, Hutt, Ajana and Galena.

³³ Bill Patrick, a student at *Alma School* between 1942 and 1948, described the teacher's residence as being, 'quite a good house by district standards of the time. However there was no telephone, no electricity and no running water to the bathroom. The only water available was from two or three rain water tanks outside the house' from Patrick, B., 'The One Teacher School', *Northampton News* - Northampton, February 1993.p. 21. The building is not mentioned as being extant in either the Vesting Order from the Governor of Western Australia (1958) or the associated covering letter from the Department for Lands and Surveys (1958).

³⁴ Gable, p. 9.

³⁵ Patrick, p. 21.

1952, the Schools' Inspector reported repairs and renovations were necessary at the school. In his report he suggested, 'that the school be consolidated on Northampton'.³⁶ On 24 August 1956, the school was officially closed and the building purchased by local residents from the Education Department for £120. An approach was made to the Northampton Road Board (now Shire of Northampton) for the building and land to be vested with it. The reserve was vested with the Board for 'hall and recreation' uses on 1 October 1959.

Between the years 1957 and 1974, *Alma School* was used for community purposes including the annual general meeting of the local residents association and for the traditional children's 'Christmas tree'. A tennis court was installed. In 1975, painting and window repairs to *Alma School* were undertaken. After this, the building was used more frequently for meetings, small concerts, quiz nights and children's parties. In 1979, damage caused by a storm was repaired by a contractor paid for by the Shire's insurance policy. In 1981, the tennis court was restored by the local community and a tennis club founded. A coloured sealed surface was provided for tennis courts in 1986. In 1988, major repairs and re-painting of *Alma School* were carried out by the local community as part of the Bicentennial celebrations. A special Bicentennial plaque was placed on a boulder external to the school. A plaque was also located at the former Udandarra Brook school site. An information board now hangs in the classroom inscribed with the names of the former head teachers and sewing mistresses, and the past presidents and past secretaries of the 'Alma Community Centre'.³⁷

Today, 'one-teacher schools are uncommon as a form of education in the State because most children are educated in schools that have more than one teacher. In 1992, only five one-teacher schools were operative in the whole of Western Australia, although today's equivalent school has one teacher plus one part time teacher (one or two days).

Alma School is now used as a venue for meetings by the local community, the Department of Agriculture, the Northampton branch of the WA Farmers Federation, by commercial suppliers of farming merchandise, and for the occasional social function.³⁸

13.2. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Alma School is sited under the branches of a large ghost gum tree in a rural area. Farms surround the site.

The building is situated on a gravel-topped surround that slopes gently down to the east providing views of the farmland pastures that surround the reserve, from the fence to the horizon. A second large ghost gum tree is located to the north-west of *Alma School* and new tree planting is evident to the immediate north of the building.

Alma School is a compact rectangular shaped, single school room with a steeply pitched roof. The building has an enclosed north facing veranda with one window and an entry door with a highlight window on the north wall. On the south wall are three large windows that extend to ceiling level,

³⁶ Gable, p. 9.

³⁷ Taylor, J., Architect, "*Condition Report - 'Alma School'*", (Perth, August 1993) p. 3.

³⁸ Taylor, p. 4.

affording excellent natural south light into the room. The floor is of polished jarrah timber which is raised one step at the western end of the classroom to create a low dais for a width of 1060 mm. A brick fire-place with a timber overmantel is located in the south-west corner of the room.

The gable ended roof is clad with red painted corrugated iron sheeting at approximately a 30 degree pitch. The underside of the eaves are lined with painted timber battens. The exterior wall cladding, including most of the veranda, is stained jarrah weather-board over timber stud framing, on jarrah joists and bearers supported by sawn jarrah stumps. The internal walls are clad with asbestos fibre cement panel sheeting, with timber battens covering the sheet joints. The ceiling (4235 mm high) is clad in plaster sheet with timber battens covering the sheet joints.

The chimney and fireplace are of red clay brick, laid in stretcher bond, and are situated in the south-west corner of the building. Above the roof sheeting the chimney is approximately 470 x 470 mm and rises to almost level with the ridge of the roof. The chimney provides a strong verticality to the building which is echoed in the extended windows.

There are louvred timber air vents at the apex of both gables for ventilating the roof space. Along with these vents there are two circular roof vents on the northern roof face, close to the ridge line, crowned with 'china-man' hats. There are four 'proprietary' metal air vents to the east and west walls of the building. These can be seen both internally and externally.

Water is collected in two circular corrugated iron rainwater tanks, one on the north side and one on the south side of the building. Mains electricity was connected to the place, in 1989, at a cost of approximately six thousand dollars and there is a combination of incandescent and fluorescent lights to the former classroom.

An upright piano and an original timber and cast iron double width bench (with back) remain as items of furniture from the period the building was used as a classroom. Fifteen original blackboards line the walls.

Concrete footings mark the location of the former 'shelter shed' (1916) situated south of *Alma School*. To the south-east of the ruins a concrete floor slab is evidence of a former single toilet.

Two fenced and floodlit tennis courts are situated to the east of the school building. In 1986, a coloured sealed surface was provided for the tennis courts. Adjacent to the courts is a concrete block shelter (1991) and weatherboard clad male and female toilets (c. 1980s). The form of the toilet block is sympathetic to the school building. There is a fenced playground sited between the tennis courts and the toilet block.

In 1988, major repairs and re-painting of *Alma School* were carried out as part of the Bicentennial celebrations. The chimney was repaired, veranda timbers replaced and resealed with stain, the interior floorboards were polished and the room painted. Electricity was provided to the building in 1989. The building has been maintained in good condition since.

13.3. REFERENCES

Gable, W. *Rural and Isolated Schools - The Development of Western Australia, School: Alma, Shire: Northampton*, (booklet, no publishing details)

John Taylor Architect, *Condition Report- 'Alma School'*, (Perth, August 1993)

Patrick, B. "The One Teacher School", *Northampton News* (Northampton, February 1993)