



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

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.

The wording of this document has been adapted from Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998, with amendments and additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.4.2 Fishing and whaling
- 3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries
- 3.8.1 Shipping to and from Australian ports
- 4.5 Making settlements to serve rural Australia
- 5.1 Working in harsh conditions
- 5.7 Surviving as indigenous people in a white-dominated economy

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 103 Racial contact and interaction
- 106 Workers (including Aboriginal, convict)
- 107 Settlements
- 110 Resource exploitation and depletion
- 201 River and sea transport
- 301 Grazing, pastoralism and dairying
- 305 Fishing and other maritime industry
- 403 Law and order
- 601 Aborigines
- 602 Early settlers

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The natural landscape of the place provides a background setting for the archaeological remains of the townsite, which has unusual aesthetic qualities relating to light, colour, topography and vegetation. (Criterion 1.1)

The Police Station Complex has considerable aesthetic value for its architectural design and form and is now a landmark presence in the archaeological townsite, as the most substantial structure remaining. (Criteria 1.1 & 1.3)

The Police Station Complex was adapted from a standard PWD plan to take into account the hot desert conditions of the Ashburton River area. (Criterion 1.2)

Old Onslow Townsite has high aesthetic appeal for its natural and cultural heritage landscape on the banks of the Ashburton River and the evocative atmosphere of an isolated and now abandoned townsite in the North West of the State. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Old Onslow Townsite has significance for its associations with the development of the North West of the State in the late nineteenth century. Developed as a port town to service the populations of large pearling fleets that operated seasonally along the North West coastline from the nineteenth century, and the local pastoral industries, the place was important in providing goods and services to the district from 1885 up to its abandonment in 1925. (Criterion 2.1)

The establishment of the place reflects the frontier mentality and private enterprise ethic of the era, which exploited natural resources throughout Western Australia, including indigenous and indentured Asian labour. This attitude and approach to settlement underpinned the European colonialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Australia and around the world. (Criterion 2.1)

The place has associations with European exploration of the area in the 1860s, which resulted in many of those who took part in the expeditions taking out pastoral leases in the Ashburton district. (Criterion 2.2)

The place has associations with the Battle or Massacre of Minderoo, having been used as a camp for members of an 1867 expedition, who later took part in a massacre of local Aboriginal people in the vicinity of the area. (Criterion 2.2)

The Police Station Complex has associations with the conflict between Aboriginal people and European settlers and the treatment and imprisonment

* 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.

of Aborigines in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first part of the prison was specifically designed for the incarceration and containment of Aboriginal prisoners. (Criterion 2.2)

The place has associations with owners of pearling companies and pastoral properties such as the Forrest family, a prominent political and social family, and notorious businessmen McRae and Mackay, who exploited Aboriginal people as divers in the pearling industry. (Criterion 2.3)

The place has associations with J. Clark, who was involved in the establishment of the port at the Ashburton River in 1882/1883. Responsible for the construction of the jetty, first general store and Rob Roy Hotel among other enterprises, he played a large part in the development of the town in the 1880s and monopolized business activities there into the early 1900s. (Criterion 2.3)

The Police Station Complex has associations with Chief Architect of the Public Works Department George Temple Poole. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The archaeological sites of *Old Onslow Townsite*, including the river and sea jetties, the Ashburton and Rob Roy Hotels, the magistrate's house, the Post and Telegraph Station, the Police Station Complex, the cemetery, the tramline and bridges, the telegraph lines and pearl middens, have the potential to reveal information about the history of the development and the abandonment of the town. The place has the ability to contribute to a wider understanding of the State through use as a teaching and research site. (Criteria 3.1 & 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Located near the Ashburton River mouth, the place is a popular tourist destination for camping and fishing. (Criterion 4.1)

As the location of the first Onslow townsite, the place has high social significance to the local and wider community for its contribution to an understanding of the town and the area, and adds to the local community's sense of place. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

Old Onslow Townsite is of high social significance to the local Aboriginal community, who have strong memories of the place relating to conflict between local Aboriginal people and European settlers of the area, the Battle/Massacre of Minderoo in 1867, and the exploitation of Aboriginal workers in the pearling and pastoral industries. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Old Onslow Townsite is a rare example of an historical archaeological site of a former 'frontier' settlement in a very remote area of the North West of the State. (Criteria 5.1 & 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Old Onslow Townsite is representative of a town developed to service the local pearling and pastoral industries in the remote North West of the State. The town's abandonment in 1925 reflects the depression and boom of the local economy during the period of its settlement and the need to relocate services to a more viable position. (Criterion 6.1)

The plan of *Old Onslow Townsite*, with its centre, residential area and labourers' camps, reflects European colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal, Japanese, Chinese, Malay, Filipino, Afghan and Italian workers and their families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Old Onslow Townsite is in ruinous and therefore poor condition.

The Police Station Complex requires urgent attention to stabilise the existing fabric.

12.4 INTEGRITY

As an archaeological site, the integrity of the place is high.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The place has a high degree of authenticity, as most sites have been undisturbed and are relatively intact, although subject to weathering and deterioration due to climatic conditions. The Rob Roy Hotel and several bottle middens within the site have been disturbed.

The most intact building on the site, the Police Station Complex, has a high degree of authenticity, remaining largely as per the work carried out in 1906/1907 despite being in a ruinous state. Reusable materials such as the verandah and roofing were removed at the time the townsite was abandoned in 1925.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Supporting evidence has been taken from Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the Documentary Evidence refer to Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998, p17,18 & 29 - 77.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the Physical Evidence refer to Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998, p25 - 77.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

For a discussion of the Comparative Information refer to Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998, p78 - 85.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

Amanda Jean, Michal Bosworth, Sandra Goulder and Glenys Hayes, 'Old Onslow Townsite, Pilbara, Western Australia: A Conservation Plan', prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in conjunction with the Australian Heritage Commission, November 1998.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH
