



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

Suspension footbridge contributes to the aesthetic qualities of the culturally modified landscape along the banks of Collie River. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Suspension footbridge is significant as evidence of the continuing use of a pedestrian footbridge at this site since the erection of the original bridge in 1904-1905. (Criterion 2.1)

The place is a significant reminder of the early development of the town in the first decade of the twentieth century. (Criterion 2.2)

It demonstrates technical achievement as it is one of only a few suspension footbridges in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

It is significant in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a suspension footbridge and has some scientific value as a teaching site. (Criterion 3.1)

The place is significant in demonstrating an understanding of the human occupation of the locality as the bridge has provided community access since the initial construction at the site. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

It is highly valued by the community for social reasons, including access and past associations with leisure activities connected with the river. (Criterion 4.1)

It contributes to the community's sense of place, as a distinctive feature of their built environment. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Suspension footbridge is one of a very few suspension foot bridges in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

It is significant in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a suspension footbridge. (Criterion 6.1)

It is significant in its origins and subsequent history in demonstrating the involvement of the community in its building and re-building; and in its utilisation by the community as a customary means of easy access across the Collie River. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Suspension footbridge is in reasonable physical condition, though there are instances of local failure which have caused the Shire to close access. There is evidence of maintenance and renewal.

There would appear to be no construction maintenance programme in place.

In summary, *Suspension footbridge* is in sound but not safe condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The evidence strongly suggests that the original concept is represented by replacement fabric and still has a capacity to perform its original function. The present *Suspension footbridge* is capable of being conserved if timely action is undertaken.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The documentary and physical evidence, indicates that the present *Suspension footbridge* is a replacement structure at or about the location of the original bridge. The fabric is of low authenticity in relation to the original bridge.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Robin Chinnery, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Philip Griffiths, Architect of Considine and Griffiths Architects Pty Ltd.

The curtilage should be determined by survey and include at least 10m either side of the bridge structure.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Suspension footbridge is a simple suspension bridge (1972-83). It is a suspension footbridge, supported via four timber pylons, with a walkway of sawn jarrah bearers and longitudinal decking, hung from steel cables (possibly old mine winder cable), with a railing of small diameter water pipe, with plastic covered chain mesh infill.¹

On 23 November 1829, Lt. Surgeon Alexander Collie and Lt. Preston discovered the Collie and Preston Rivers. In March 1830, the area was explored further by John Septimus Roe and a party from the schooner *Eagle*; they travelled 10 miles up the river from Port Leschenault, then overland after the river became unnavigable due to fallen trees; subsequently the area was named Roelands.² In his report Roe spoke highly of the land, predicting its value for agriculture.³ The first pastoralists and shepherds arrived in the Collie district in the early 1880s, seeking improved pasture for their stock.⁴

Coal was discovered by either Arthur Perrin or his shepherd, George Marsh in 1882-1883; however, it remained a secret for some years.⁵ The discovery was announced in November, 1889, by Sir Frederick Broome, naming an associate of Perrin, Bunbury businessman David Hay, as the discoverer. It was to Hay's widow that the reward, offered to the finder of an adequate field of coal within 60 miles of a port to supply the colony's needs for indigenous fuel, was paid.⁶ From 1888 to 1889, Hay and his associates prospected further on the coalfields; a South Australian company was also prospecting there in this period.⁷ Further prospecting and a government drilling programme, as well as tests by the Railways Department to evaluate the coal as locomotive fuel, preceded the development of the coalfields.

In February 1896, 102,000 acres of land was opened for selection on the coalfields.⁸ The leases and the proposed townsite were surveyed by J. Ewing, who settled in the town, serving on the Roads Board, the Municipal Council and as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.⁹ By late 1897, in anticipation of the development of the coalfields, many miners had made their way to the

¹ Lloyd Margetts Inspection Report on 'Swinging Bridge' over Collie River, 3 February 1995.

² Williams, H. S. *One Day in Collie* Shire of Collie, 1959, p.6.

³ Roe, J. S. 'Report of Exploration of the Collie' cited in Williams, H. S. op. cit., p.6.

⁴ Williams, H. S. op. cit., p.9.

⁵ *ibid*, pp.10-12.

⁶ *ibid*, p.13.

⁷ *ibid*, p.14.

⁸ Western Australia *Government Gazette* 20 February 1896.

⁹ Williams, H. S. op. cit., p.24.

town.¹⁰ The town of Collie was proclaimed 13 December 1897.¹¹ Construction of the railway to the port at Bunbury, begun late 1897, was completed 1 July 1898; the railway station, named Coalville, opened 1 November 1898.¹² A short while later it was renamed Colliefields, before the name of Collie was adopted 1 December 1899, to conform with the name of the town.

The development of Collie was rapid from 1898 to 1902, as the coalfields were developed. Despite some setbacks between 1902 and 1905, Collie continued to grow. As the population increased, further areas in the town were developed to provide housing, and the Roads Board established a recreation reserve by the river. The Colliefields Estate was one of the areas opened for housing in this period.

In June 1904, the residents of the Colliefields Estate petitioned the Collie Roads Board for permission to construct a footbridge over the river 'from Colliefields Estate on to River Avenue Residential Areas. Exact Location from Block 50 Colliefields Estate onto River Avenue Residential Areas.'¹³ The bridge was to be 93 feet long and 3 feet wide, at about 10 feet above the level of the water; the estimated cost was £50.¹⁴ Permission was granted. At the next meeting of the Roads Board, when the Minutes of the preceding meeting were read, the bridge proposal was objected to 'unless the interests of the Board were protected'.¹⁵ 3 October 1904, the Roads Board reconsidered the matter, following correspondence from R. Hardman, 'with regard to the footbridge over the Collie River from Esplanade to Connor Estate.'¹⁶ The *Collie Miner* reported that Mr. Connor was willing to build the bridge, and that the Board accepted Mr. Evans' argument that it should raise no further objections on condition that 'a plan of the bridge was submitted for approval with an undertaking that when it had been constructed it would belong to the Board, who would assume all further expense.'¹⁷ The subsequent motion was passed 'that the Residents of the Colliefields Estate submit for the approval of the Board a Plan of the proposed Bridge to connect the Recreation Area with the Estate.'¹⁸ A committee comprising the Chairman of the Roads Board, Messrs. Bedlington and Wells, and the Secretary, was empowered to inspect the proposed site and 'to sanction the construction of the Bridge if they approved of the plan when submitted.'¹⁹

10 *ibid*, p.26.

11 *ibid*.

12 *ibid*.

13 Letter to Members of Collie Roads Board, 19 June 1904, Minute Book, Collie Roads Board, 14 July 1904.

14 *ibid*.

15 *Collie Miner* Saturday, 8 October 1904, p. 4.

16 *ibid*.

17 *ibid*.

18 Minute Book, Collie Roads Board, 3 October 1904.

19 *ibid*

Suspension footbridge was built in 1904-1905. The support consisted of four timber pylons. The walkway was of jarrah bearers and decking, hung from cables. It was built by Mr. Connor of Connor Estate, Collie.²⁰

Suspension footbridge provided pedestrian access to the Recreation Area and the commercial centre of Collie for residents of North Collie. In winter, the Co-Op Bridge was often flooded, leaving the *Suspension footbridge* as a vital link between the different areas of the town.²¹ The nearby area of the river was known as the River Avenue Swimming Pool, a popular bathing place for the town; following the formation of the Collie Amateur Swimming Club in November 1923, swimming carnivals were held there and in other pools in the river.²² After the second Collie Hospital was built in 1928, the bridge was used as a quicker way to reach the hospital.²³

In 1964, record floods in the South West severely damaged *Suspension footbridge*. It was rebuilt, using the original turnbuckles, by the Apex Club of Collie in 1970 with support from the Shire. New piles were provided by the Forests Department and timber for the decking was supplied by George Saunders. Apex Club members clocked up 362 service hours on this particular project.²⁴

It was evident after heavy rains that the Collie River was going to flood at a high level in 1983. The decision was made to cut the cables of the bridge at one end and swing it onto the river bank to prevent the bridge being swept away by the floodwaters. This operation was carried out as planned. The bridge was restored by the Apex Club of Collie after the river levels had dropped.²⁵

In 1983, a large fence mural measuring six metres by twenty metres was painted in Forrest Street, Collie, to coincide with the centenary of European settlement in the Collie area. It was commissioned by the local Tidy Towns Committee and the scenes chosen were 'to promote Collie's distinctive character to townspeople and visitors.'²⁶ It was later destroyed in a storm,

²⁰ Current residents of Collie have not known the year of construction of the bridge, nor the exact circumstances of its construction. Hearsay indicated that there was an earlier bridge in the vicinity, which was believed to have been built by a builder who wanted to move his building materials across the river at that place as he was developing sites on the other side of the river. Conversation by Robin Chinnery with J. Wallace of Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 16 October 1996.

It is likely that this story had its origins in fact, as research for this assessment has shown that Connor of Connor Estate was responsible for the construction of the bridge.

²¹ Conversation by Robin Chinnery with J. Wallace of Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 16 October 1996.

²² Williams, H. S. op. cit., p.98.

²³ Conversation by Robin Chinnery with J. Wallace of Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 16 October 1996).

²⁴ Site visit by Robin Chinnery Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 24 November 1996; conversation by Robin Chinnery with Nola Green of *The Collie Mail*, Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 25 November 1996; Apex Club minutes and reports provided by Alan Wade of Apex in Collie.

²⁵ Conversation by Robin Chinnery with Nola Green of *The Collie Mail*, Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 25 November 1996.

²⁶ Frances, R. 'Visual Celebrations of Community: Murals and their Messages in Collie', in Layman, L. and Stannage, T. Eds. *Celebrations in Western Australian History* (University of Western Australia, 1989) pp. 124-125.

and was replaced by a fence mural in Throssell Street, the main street of Collie.²⁷ The third panel of this fence mural depicted *Suspension footbridge* ; its inclusion in the mural was indicative of its place in the minds of the local community as a distinctive and well known feature of Collie.

Students at the Fairview Primary School have used the bridge to by- pass the busy main road. The bridge was in daily use by Collie residents from its restoration in 1983 to 1995.²⁸

On 20 January 1995, the Shire Council resolved to authorise the Shire Engineer to remove the bridge 'in the interests of public safety.'²⁹ In February 1995, Gutteridge Haskins & Davey Pty. Ltd. recommended closure of the bridge, expressing the view that given the age of the bridge and that it was unlikely to comply with the required Australian standards as it did not ' appear to have been designed by an engineer', it should be re-designed and replaced with a new construction; the estimated construction cost of a new bridge, including engineer fees, was \$154,000-\$198,000.³⁰ This view was supported by another consulting engineer, Dick van Noort, who recommended that 'the bridge be removed and a new structure designed and put in its place.'³¹ However, following the lodging of a petition with 840 signatures requesting that the bridge be saved, it was closed to public access instead.³² This closure did not prevent its use entirely. It was reported in February 1995, that 'all the children in creation are playing on it.'³³ Subsequently, the Shire allocated \$16,500 for an investigation and structural report by Mr. Peter Scott, of Halpern Glick and Maunsell, to report on what was required to conserve the bridge, and to advise the estimated cost of effecting any repairs.³⁴

Since it was built in 1904-1905, *Suspension footbridge* has been an important facility for the residents of Collie, recognised also as a landmark and a tourist attraction. It is considered by local residents to be an important part of their heritage. It remains closed to public access for safety reasons, pending any decision about its future. A recent site visit indicates that as reported in February 1996, local children continue to use *Suspension footbridge* .³⁵

²⁷ ibid.

²⁸ Conversation by Robin Chinnery with J. Wallace of Collie Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 16 October 1996.

²⁹ Minutes, Shire of Collie, 14 February 1995.

³⁰ Correspondence 1 and 6 February 1995 from Gutteridge Haskins & Davey Pty. Ltd. to Shire of Collie.

³¹ Letter from Dirk van Noort to The Shire Engineer, Shire of Collie, 9 February 1995.

³² *The Collie Mail* 16 February 1995, p.1.

³³ ibid.

³⁴ Item No. 3 Register Committee Meeting No. 33, 27 October 1995, H.C.W.A.

³⁵ Site visit by Robin Chinnery Memo, HCWA file PD 3551, 24 November 1996.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Suspension footbridge is a construction consisting of four circular timber pylons, a plank construction walkway on sawn jarrah bearers suspended from steel cables. It has a steel pipe handrail and linkmesh balustrade infill. The bridge crosses the Collie River in a north-south direction.

Suspension footbridge is located in the river reserve with its starting points situated above the flood plain of the river, with access to the southern side via an open park area and on the northern side via a rear access right of way. The immediate environs of the bridge at the abutments are covered with Eucalypts, Acacia and weeds to the understorey. *Suspension footbridge*, is an isolated structure and does not relate to any other structures. It makes a link between the south suburban centre and the recreation area and the commercial centre of the town to the north.

Suspension footbridge comprises pairs of 6m high by .55m diameter pylons at each end in the abutments, founded in a manner that was not determined. A .032m diameter steel wire cable is suspended between pylons and anchored into the ground at each end. The structure of the carriageway is suspended from the cables with 0.16m diameter rods attached to the cable on hangers. The hangers carry .015m square sawn jarrah bearers via a pair of eyelet bolts to each bearer. The eyelet bolt attached to the bearer has a steel back plate and the connection passes through the back plate and is fixed in place by nuts. The bearers are set at approximately 2.3m centres and six .220m x .050m thick sawn boards span between bearers to form the deck. The board fixings were not determined, but at each bearer a .075m x .008m steel strap is fixed over the top of the boards. A balustrade of .040m galvanised steel tube top and bottom rails supports a balustrade panel of plastic coated link mesh.

Suspension footbridge is a simple utilitarian structure which employs a structural principle rather than expressing a style.

The original suspension footbridge was constructed circa 1904-1905; however, the evidence in the materials used in the fabric of *Suspension footbridge* suggests nothing earlier than the 1972 reconstruction by the Apex Club of Collie.

Some balustrade sections have broken and there is some loss of material in the pylons, together with one or two suspension rod connection failures. Otherwise from a visual inspection members seem to be in reasonable condition. Inspections have been made by engineers independently; firstly by Lloyd Margetts and then Peter Scott of Halpern Glick and Maunsell, but neither is detailed. No previous report has been prepared on the original location of the first suspension footbridge to compare it with the location of the present bridge.

13. 3 REFERENCES

No key references.