



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)

- 2.4.2 Migrating to seek opportunity
- 2.4.5 Changing the face of rural and urban Australian through migration
- 3.9 Farming for commercial profit
- 4.5 Making settlements to serve rural Australia
- 4.9 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities
- 6.2 Establishing schools
- 8.6.1 Worshipping together
- 8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 101 Immigration, emigration and refugees
- 104 Land allocation and subdivision
- 106 Workers
- 107 Settlements
- 301 Grazing, pastoralism and dairying
- 306 Domestic activities
- 403 Law and order
- 406 Religion
- 602 Early settlers
- 603 Local heroes and battlers
- 605 Famous and infamous people

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Morby Farm Cottage is a good example of a Victorian Georgian farmhouse, which adopted the characteristic simple rectangular form and symmetry of this style. Like many early rural dwellings, it paid attention to architectural detailing, through the use of stucco, ruled-ashlar finish to the main façade, with stucco architraves to the openings, and of finely detailed glazing bars for the windows. This applied detailing reflected a subtle influence of the more sophisticated Victorian Regency style and implied a higher social status for the occupants. (Criterion 1.1)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam was constructed for John Morrell, the first colonist to settle in the Northam district. Morrell's journey to Western Australia from England, and his subsequent settlement in Northam tells a rich story of early colonial life, ranging from his inventory of goods including window frames and doors accompanying family on the ship, to his first experience of colonial life living in a small shack in Cockburn Sound, to the establishment of his farm in Northam and its production of the district's first butter. (Criterion 2.3)

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam was the first house to be constructed in Northam and as such provides evidence of the first phase of colonial settlement in the region in the 1830s. (Criterion 2.1)

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam was the first farm to be established in the Northam district. It produced the district's first dairy in the 1830s sending butter to market in 1835, and was the first to use mechanised machinery in the 1850s. (Criterion 2.2)

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam is associated with Frederick Morrell, who resided at the property from 1843 until 1871. Frederick was an important figure in the local community, he was the Postmaster for a time, was instrumental in establishing *St John's Anglican Church and Parish Hall, Northam* and was the Director of the Flour Mill Co (Northam Flour Mill). (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam has the potential to reveal information about the construction methods and materials brought to Western Australia from England, particularly the window frames, doors and window panes that Morrell brought with him from England and installed at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*. (Criterion 3.2)

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam was constructed for and by John Morrell, a trained carpenter. The place is unusual as a building constructed by an owner/builder and has the potential to reveal further information about the techniques of nineteenth century English carpenters. (Criterion 3.2)

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For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus 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.

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam has the potential, through archaeological investigation to reveal evidence and material dating back to the settlement of the site in 1832 which may provide a wider understanding of the day-to-day life of the region's earliest settlers. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam has social value to the community of Northam, who value the place as the first house to be constructed in the region, and for its association with John Morrell, the first settler in the Northam district. The operation of the place as a museum for local history, and the place's inclusion on the local Municipal Inventory, is evidence of the value that the local community attribute to the place. (4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam is rare as one of Western Australia's oldest surviving residences. (Criterion 5.1)

The original window frames, doors and window panes of *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*, are rare as items known to have been brought to the colony from England in 1830 by the original owner of the house. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam is representative of the simple type and style of residences constructed in the early colonial period in Western Australia. However, unlike many early rural dwellings, its subtle architectural details reflect the higher social status of the original occupants. (Criterion 6.1)

Through its use as a residence as well simultaneously serving as the town's first church, first school, first courthouse, first retail outlet and first postal centre, *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* demonstrates the typical historic practice of early Western Australian settlements, where private homes were also the location of multiple civic activities (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Morby Farm Cottage was extensively refurbished in the 1980s and the building and grounds have generally been maintained in a good condition, including attention to roofing, roof plumbing, drainage and general maintenance. There is, however, evidence of historical structural issues with prominent outward bowing to the upper section of the north elevation and to the central section of the western elevation. Documentary evidence indicates that the west wall was underpinned in the mid-1980s. Physical and oral evidence indicates that fine cracking to this wall has been repeatedly patched over time, but continues to open up. There is no visible evidence of any major cracking.

All exposed joints to the stonework have been re-mortared in recent years and are in a sound condition. There is some localised patching and hollowness to the surviving ruled stucco finish to the main façade.

Internally, the brick floors (which were revealed by the removal of later concrete floors in the mid-1980s) have settled as an uneven surface and are showing evidence of differential wear, and localised areas of fretting.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Morby Farm Cottage is no longer occupied a private residence, but its adaptation as a house museum clearly interprets the original use and the place has a medium-high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Morby Farm Cottage has a high degree of authenticity as a nineteenth century farm house. The front and side yards have a moderate degree of authenticity, while the rear yard (which was originally part of a working farm yard) has a low degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place was prepared by the State Heritage Office in June 2015. The physical evidence was prepared by Greenward Consulting in November 2014.

Amendments and/or additions have been carried out by the State Heritage Office and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam is a single storey, random-rubble building with an iron roof constructed by John Morrell in 1836. It was the first house to be constructed in Northam, and is one of the earliest extant residences in the State.

Shortly after the Swan River Colony was establishment in 1829, settlers were quick to discover that it was not as lush, fertile or productive as expected, and by 1830 explorations into the colony's interior were underway in search of better land. In late-1830, explorers were successful in their search and found productive agricultural land beyond the area of initial settlement in the region now known as the Avon Valley. In November 1830, the Lands and Surveys Department set aside land in this area for the townsites of Northam, York and Beverley.¹

Despite its early foundation, the Northam district did not immediately develop owing to the majority of its land being owned by absentee land owners, and the difficulties of establishing a new settlement so far from the Swan River settlement.² The first to settle in the district was John Morrell, who first came to Northam in 1832, and in 1836 built *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*.³

¹ Garden, Donald S., *Northam: An Avon Valley History* (1979), p.4.

² Garden, *Northam* (1979), pp. 5, 6, 12.,

³ Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (Town of Northam, c.1995).

John Morrell left England for Western Australia in September 1830, little over a year after the Swan River Colony was established in June 1829.⁴ Morrell was a carpenter by trade but had the ambition of becoming a farmer in the new colony.⁵ He sailed from London on 1 September 1830 on the *Rambler*, accompanied by his wife and family, William and Peter Chidlow, farmers and employees/partners of Morrell, a female servant and a labourer. Morrell's party also brought with them a large supply of agricultural machinery, carpentry tools, window frames and doors, small panes of glass for his future house, guns and ammunition, a cheese press, as well as some cattle and a quantity of food – barrels of flour, beef, pork, cases of butter, bags of cereal and packets of seeds.⁶

The Morrell's disembarked the *Rambler* in Cape Town and boarded the *Eliza* for the final leg to Western Australia. In Cape Town, Morrell bought more supplies, including fruit trees, vines, and seed potatoes.⁷

The *Eliza* struck a sandbank at Cockburn Sound, 13 miles south of Fremantle, in February/March 1831 and the Morrell's disembarked. The party were transferred to land via small boats, and all their worldly possessions were left in piles in the scrub.⁸ They erected a small shack at their landing point, and lived there for about four months before moving to Fremantle in mid-1831.⁹

As a carpenter, Morrell's skills were in high demand in the fledgling Fremantle port.¹⁰ His family settled in Fremantle for a short period, farming a small area in Fremantle (near where the present Town Hall stands) and a larger area at Karrakatta. Neither area was particularly successful.¹¹

In July 1832 Morrell set out from Fremantle to claim the 4,600 acre land grant for which he was eligible.¹² Morrell followed the track to York and then cut his own road beside the Avon River to present day Northam.¹³ Morrell chose an area of land on the Avon River just to the north of the present day Northam townsite, where he would build *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* a few years later. Despite not being formally granted his land until early 1836, it is likely that Morrell initially

⁴ 'Settlement and Development: The Historical Context', in Pitt Morison, Margaret and White, John (eds.), *Western Towns and Buildings* (University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands: 1979), p. 4.

⁵ John Stokes, 'John Morrell – biography of early settler at Fremantle, Karrakatta and Northam', *The Western State* (1976), p. 75. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995).

⁶ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 75. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995). 'John Morrell: Founder of Northam', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1933, p. 4.

⁷ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 75.

⁸ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 76.

⁹ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 76. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995).

¹⁰ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 76. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995).

¹¹ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 77.

¹² Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (Town of Northam, c.1995). Garden, *Northam* (1979), p.12.

¹³ Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 77. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995).

established a temporary shack at his chosen site and then started cultivating the land with the assistance of William and Peter Chidlow.¹⁴

Shortly after selecting his land, Morrell returned to Perth where he had been contracted to build Government House.¹⁵ Morrell's wife Ann passed away in Fremantle in October 1832,¹⁶ and it is thought that Morrell remained in Perth or Fremantle to continue working for a time after her death.

By seeding time (mid-year) in 1833, Morrell's team had established Northam's first farm at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*. They had cleared and ploughed a small paddock with a single-furrow plough drawn by a horse and bullock.¹⁷ The two Chidlow men were largely responsible for making Morrell's farm a success, much to their benefit, as Morrell had agreed to transfer 1,450 acres of his grant to Peter Chidlow for their assistance with the property.¹⁸ In 1835, the Chidlow's produced the district's first butter at Morrell's farm and sent it to Perth for sale.¹⁹

Morrell married his second wife Eleanor in February 1834 and returned to the Avon Valley in 1835.²⁰

By June 1836, Morrell had built *Morby Farm Cottage*. This was the first house to be constructed in Northam.

The house was constructed from local stone, with a shingle roof, and utilised the window frames, doors and window panes that Morrell had brought with him from England.²¹ The simple Victorian Georgian farmhouse incorporated five rooms (with a hallway), with the northern most room being used as a kitchen with a large fireplace. The interior floors were originally handmade brick (restored in 1985²²). Some of the brickwork still retains thumbprints to the visible surface (either as a makers mark or simply as a result of working the damp clay).

The cottage includes architectural detailing, such as the use of a stucco, ruled-ashlar finish to the main façade, with stucco architraves to the openings, and finely detailed glazing bars for the windows. This applied detailing reflected a subtle influence of the more sophisticated Victorian Regency style and implied the occupants had, or aspired to, a higher social status.

By 1837, the census reported that Morrell's farm was developing well, with nine acres of wheat under crop, five of barley, two of rye and half an acre of garden.

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- 14 Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (Town of Northam, c.1995). 'John Morrell: Founder of Northam', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1933, p. 4.
- 15 'Springfield Homestead: Some Historical Features – And Its Passing...', *Sunday Times*, 10 July 1921, p.13.
- 16 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 13.
- 17 Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 77.
- 18 Garden, *Northam* (1979), pp. 13, 14.
- 19 'John Morrell: Founder of Northam', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1933, p. 4.
- 20 Erickson, R., *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1914, Volume 3, K-Q* (1987), p. 2234. Morby Cottage Management Committee, 'Morby Cottage Guide Notes', (c.1995).
- 21 Stokes, 'John Morrell', *The Western State* (1976), p. 77. 'Recent Tour to the Eastward and Northward of Northam', *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 18 June 1836, p 713
- 22 Palassis Architect, *Report on Moby Cottage Northam*, prepared for the Town of Northam (April 1985). Letter to the WA Heritage Committee dated 7 November 1988.

He had also planted vines, trees and potatoes he had brought from Cape Town, and kept 329 sheep, 85 goats, 43 cattle and 12 swine.²³

Morrell continued to work at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* until his death in October 1843, aged 57. He died after contracting pneumonia while rescuing a drowning man in the Avon River. Morrell was buried at a site between his farm and Northam town. In 1929 a memorial monument was erected at Morrell's grave. This place is entered in to the State Register as P1885 *John Morrell's Grave*.

Following Morrell's death, his children Frederick, Richard and Anne inherited *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*, with Frederick taking over its management.²⁴ Frederick worked and lived at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* until the early 1870s,²⁵ when he left the farm to his children, and moved into town to open a store.²⁶

Frederick was himself a significant figure in the local community. As well as continuing the successes of his father's farm, he was the Postmaster from 1849 to 1853 and 1859 to 1862 with the Post Office operating from *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*, he was instrumental in the establishment of P1891 *St John's Anglican Church and Parish Hall, Northam*, he was a Director of the Flour Mill Co (P10889 Northam Flour Mill), and employed 12 ticket-of-leave men between 1855 and 1871 (possibly to work the farm at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*).²⁷

During the time when Frederick was in charge, the cottage became an important centre for the Northam settlement. It was Northam's first church from the mid-1840s until 1851,²⁸ it was the district's first school from 1851 to 1865,²⁹ it functioned as the first courthouse in 1856,³⁰ it was the districts first and only retail outlet until 1860,³¹ and also was the first local postal centre from the 1850s.³²

23 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 14. Shire of Northam, *Northam Municipal Heritage Inventory* (2012), p. 39.

24 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 16.

25 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 79.

26 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 79.

27 Gray, Laura., and Sauman, Irene., *Post Office and Quarters (fmr) and Girls' and Boys' School (fmr) Northam: Conservation Management Plan* prepared for the Shire of Northam (2011), p. 8. Erickson, *The Bicentennial Dictionary, Volume 3, K-Q* (1987), p. 2233. Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 79.

28 'Northam's Hundred Years of Progress: The Spread of Knowledge, Church Schools and Newspapers', *Western Mail*, 21 September 1933, p. 10.

29 Gray and Sauman, 'Post Office and Quarters (fmr) and Girls' and Boys' School (fmr) Northam' Conservation Management Plan', (2011), p. 13. 'Northam's Hundred Years of Progress', *Western Mail*, 21 September 1933, p. 10.

30 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 64.

n.b. In 1856, when the Government had started to sell land in Northam, largely to encourage a settlement to development, the sitting room at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* was host to the district's first court. Little reference has been found to the operation of court proceedings at Morby, which suggests that the court either operated infrequently, or this was a one-off. Northam's first purpose-built courthouse was opened in 1866. Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 64. Hocking Planning and Architecture, 'Northam Police Station and Court House: Conservation Plan' (1995), p. 22.

31 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 69.

32 Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 32.

As well as the many firsts hosted at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*, the farm itself has significance. In 1856, Frederick introduced the first mechanised machinery to thresh wheat.³³

In 1871, after Frederick rescinded control of *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*, its management was taken over by his sons John Frederick, James and David Thomas.³⁴

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, coinciding with Frederick's death in 1899,³⁵ much of the once large landholdings of *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* was sold off and subdivided to create new areas of housing for the town of Northam.³⁶ By 1904, the property was no longer in the ownership of the Morrell's,³⁷ with Frederick's sons focusing on farms and ventures elsewhere in Northam and across the State.³⁸ Contemporary newspapers suggest that Morrell's continued to live at the Morby residence until at least 1920 when the cottage was the home of Elizabeth Harriet (Bessie/Betsie, daughter of Frederick) upon her death.³⁹

The property went through a number of private owners through the twentieth century until it was transferred to the Town of Northam in 1978.⁴⁰ From that time, the building has been managed by a local Morby House Restoration Committee.⁴¹

Extensive refurbishment of the cottage occurred in the late 1970s and 1980s, including the replacement of the roof, removal of concrete floors (and exposure of original brick floors) and underpinning of the western wall.

The cultural heritage significance of *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* became recognised in the 1980s, firstly with its classification by the National Trust in 1980, then its permanent entry in to the Register of the National Estate in 1982, and lastly with its inclusion in the Shire of Northam's Municipal Inventory as a place of Exceptional Significance in 1998.

In 2015, *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* continues to be owned and managed by the Shire of Northam. The cottage now operates as a museum, and is open to the public one day a week.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam (1836), a simple single-storey random-stone and corrugated iron farmhouse in the Victorian Georgian style with some Victorian Regency detailing.

The building has five rooms and a hallway set within a long rectangular plan

³³ Threshing is the process of separating grain or seed from straw and chaff by some mechanical means, as by beating with a flail or by the action of a threshing machine. Definition sourced from Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/thresh> Accessed on 24 March 2015.

³⁴ Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 96.

³⁵ Erickson, *The Bicentennial Dictionary, Volume 3, K-Q* (1987), p. 2233.

³⁶ Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 150.

³⁷ Certificate of Title Vol. 309 Fol. 148, 27 July 1904.

³⁸ Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 96.

³⁹ 'Death of Miss Morrell', *Northam Courier*, 30 January 1920, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Certificate of Title Vol. 1515 Fol. 100, 26 September 1978.

⁴¹ Palassis Architects, 'Report on Morby Cottage Northam for the Town of Northam (1985)

form, which measures approximately 23.3 x 6.1m. Verandahs extend along the full width of the front and rear facades. The external walls are approximately 450mm thick, while most of the internal walls are approximately 350mm thick, the exception being the wall between the two southern rooms, which supports the chimney for back-to-back fireplaces and is the same thickness as the external walls.

An advertisement placed for the sale of the property in 1913 stated that the site also included a bathroom, washhouse, large stable and shed and the latter two can be glimpsed behind the house in a photograph dated 1910.⁴² An aerial photograph of Northam dated 1956⁴³ confirms that the large outbuildings had been demolished by the mid-twentieth century and, in the period since the late 1970s, the rear yard has been redeveloped as part of the adaptation of the place as a museum.

The long axis of the building lies on a NNW-SSE alignment. For the purpose of this report the main façade (which faces WSW) has been described as the west elevation.

Siting

Morby Farm Cottage is located on the eastern side of Katrine Road, approximately 2km NNE of the centre of Northam. This originally rural setting has been subdivided into large rural allotments to the north and west, with closer urban settlement to the south-east (linking to the township). The area immediately around *Morby Farm Cottage* currently remains as open paddocks, while on the opposite side of the road, treed paddocks slope down to the nearby Mortlock River (a small tributary of the Avon River).

Description of Site Features

The landscaped garden extends forwards of the lot boundary and the front fence and at least two significant trees are located on the road reserve. The access track to the rear carpark for the museum is also located outside of the lot, along the northern boundary. The grounds to the house are enclosed by a tall, plain timber picket fence, which interprets the photographic evidence from 1910.

The front yard has been landscaped as a small cottage garden with informal flowerbeds defined by random stone edging and surrounded by the natural clay surface. The primary elements of this area are two mature pepper trees (*Shinus molle*), which frame the ends of the building along the front boundary. Photographic evidence confirms that these, together with another large tree (only the stump of which remains) were already large trees in 1910, and they may date from the early period of development.

On the northern side of the house the dominant element is a large date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), which was also well established in 1910. On the southern side of the house there is a row of five kurrajong trees (*Brachychiton*), which were out of sight on the 1910 photograph, but are known to have been well

⁴² *The West Australian*, 18 October 1913, p 3; and framed photograph in the passageway of Morby Farm Cottage.

⁴³ Landgate Map Viewer – Aerial Photograph of the Northam Townsite dated 4 November 1956 (<https://www.landgate.wa.gov.au/bmvf/app/mapviewer/>)

established by the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁴

The available evidence indicates that the rear yard was originally a working farm yard with stables and sheds, as well as small domestic outbuildings. All of these early outbuildings have been demolished, but it is likely that significant archaeological evidence regarding the layout and use of the rear yard remains in-situ. This area is now laid out as an open lawn, with modern brick paths leading between the house, the unpaved rear carpark, a modern toilet and store (along the northern boundary), and a relocated forge and modern museum display shed (at the south-east corner).

Exterior

Morby Farm Cottage is a good example of a simple Victorian Georgian farmhouse, which adopted the characteristic simple rectangular form of this style and paid particular attention to symmetry in the layout of the varied head heights of the openings. Unlike many early rural dwellings, it also paid attention to architectural detailing, through the use of a stucco, ruled-ashlar finish to the main façade, with stucco architraves to the openings, and of finely detailed glazing bars for the windows. The applied elements reflected a subtle influence of the more sophisticated Victorian Regency style.

As part of the adaptation of the place as a museum, the rendered and ruled finish to the side facades has been removed and the walls repointed to reveal the random stonework. However, the photograph dated 1910 indicates that the northern wall, at least, was traditionally rendered or lime-washed.

The roof has a north-south ridgeline with a panelled gable at the northern end and a hip at the southern end. It is clad with short-sheet corrugated iron and has modern ogee profile gutters and rectangular profile downpipes. Two large chimneys serve the kitchen hearth (Room 2) and back-to-back fireplaces (Rooms 5 and 6). The roof extends in a broken-back alignment as raked roofs over the front and back verandahs (although the front verandah can be seen to be bull-nosed in the 1910 photograph).

The main western façade has a central doorway, flanked by two windows to the main hall and two slightly taller windows to the end rooms. As noted above, each of these openings has stucco architraves, which provide a simple rectangular frame that flares out at each corner. All of the windows are timber casements with finely moulded glazing bars, which divide each panel into a narrow outer pane and wider central pane. The windows to the hallway are divided vertically into four equal panes, while the taller windows to the end rooms are divided vertically into five equal panes.

The existing timber verandah was constructed in the 1980s to replace an unsympathetic concrete verandah, and is enclosed by a conjectural cross-brace timber balustrade. Centrally located timber steps lead to the entrance path.

The eastern (rear) façade has an original rear door leading from the kitchen, near the northern end of the building. Traditional casement windows matching those to the front façade remain to Room 2 (4 panes high) and Rooms 3 and 4 (2½ panes high). Brick repairs to the reveals indicate that the sills to the openings to

⁴⁴ Landgate Map Viewer – Aerial Photograph of the Northam Townsite dated 4 November 1956 (<https://www.landgate.wa.gov.au/bmvf/app/mapviewer/>)

Rooms 3 and 6 have been lowered. The opening to Room 3 appears to have originally matched the small windows to Rooms 4 and 5, but has been cut down and fitted with French doors, which have similar (but not matching) frames. The window to Room 6 appears to have originally matched the window to Room 1, but has been replaced with a new window that is 5 panes high (matching the modern French doors, but set above ground level). These openings variously have timber or rendered lintels.

The verandah floor has been brick paved and verandah area partly enclosed by a cross-brace timber balustrade (to separate the verandah from the open brick drain that runs along its edge).

The building generally appears to be in a sound condition, but there is evidence of past structural issues with prominent outward bowing to the upper section of the north elevation and to the central section of the western elevation. Physical and oral evidence indicates that there is associated fine cracking that has been repeatedly patched over time, but that continues to open up. There is no visible evidence of any major cracking. Small tie rods and beams have been installed over time to stabilise the central section of the western wall, which has no cross walls for a length of nearly 12m and carries the outward thrust of the collar beam truss. Some remedial works were also undertaken to underpin this wall as part of the conservation works of the mid-1980s.

All exposed joints to the stonework have been re-mortared in recent years and are in a sound condition. There is some localised patching and drumminess to the surviving ruled stucco finish to the main façade.

Interior

The main hallway (Room 1, approx. 11.7 x 1.49m) runs parallel to the front verandah. Doors at either end open onto the kitchen (northern end, Room 2, approx. 4.9 x 5.3m) and main living room (southern end, Room 6, approx. 5.0 x 5.2m). Along its eastern side, doors open onto three smaller rooms (Rooms 3, 4 & 5, each approx. 3.65 x 3.4m).

All rooms have plastered walls with a slightly uneven finish, and mini-orb corrugated iron ceilings. Adjacent to the external walls to the east, west and south, these have raked corners reflecting the pitch of the roof. What appears to be a traditional painted timber panel remains to the raked section along the southern side of Room 6, with a complimentary finish along the western side of this room. Modern varnished boards have been fitted along the eastern side of Room 6 and to Room 1. In the other rooms the raked sections, and vertical panels over the internal walls, have been finished with mini-orb as a continuation of the finish to the ceilings.

Room 2 has a stone floor and Room 6 a timber floor, both of which were described as “recent works” in 1985.⁴⁵ Concrete floors were removed from the other rooms at that time, revealing original brick floors that were “retained and restored”.⁴⁶ These are early handmade bricks, some of which retain thumbprints to the visible surface (either as a makers mark or simply as a result of working

⁴⁵ Palassis Architect, *Report on Moby Cottage Northam for the Town of Northam* (1985).

⁴⁶ Palassis Architect, *Report on Moby Cottage Northam for the Town of Northam* (1985). Letter to the WA Heritage Committee dated 7 November 1988.

the damp clay). These bricks are generally in a fair to good condition, but have settled as an uneven surface and are showing evidence of differential wear, and minor areas of fretting.

The hallway and Room 6 have rendered skirtings with a flat face and roughly raked upper edge. These sit partly over the edge of the bricks, suggesting that they may be contemporary finishes. In 1985 the kitchen and one of the central three rooms were specifically noted as having no skirtings. The information provided is slightly ambiguous, but at least one of the central rooms had a timber skirting. The kitchen still has no skirting, but Rooms 4 and 5 have matching, robust moulded timber skirtings, while the timber skirting to Room 3 has a more slender profile.

The traditional timber architraves to the doors and windows appear to be largely intact, and feature simple (but relatively elegant) detailing based on the rolled edges to the slender profile jamb linings, lintel plates and sills. The casement windows have fine moulded glazing bars, sliding bar casement stays at the base and simple slide bolts to the top and bottom. A few panes of early drawn glass remain intact. Doors are all low-waisted with four panels, fitted with rimlocks and a variety of round handles. The detailing of all of the doors is plain and utilitarian and each opening sits over a timber sill.

There are fireplaces to Room 2 (kitchen), Room 5 and Room 6. The latter two each have a brick hob, an open air intake vent at the base and plain timber surround and mantelpiece. The larger kitchen hearth has an arched opening, also surrounded by a plain timber surround and mantelpiece.

It is possible that the *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* was originally a single room cottage dating from 1836 or before, and was later expanded to its present day size. Contemporary accounts of the building describe it in June 1836 as “a well sized house with windows framed and glazed, a snug fire-place and chimney.”⁴⁷ A comparison of this description with the present place (which has two chimneys, two fireplaces and a large kitchen hearth), suggests that it may have been enlarged later in the nineteenth century. There is, however, no obvious physical evidence of extensions (in either the detailing or form) and the place presents as a unified Victorian Georgian farmhouse, with some Victorian Regency influence on the detailing of the main façade.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Morby Farm Cottage, Northam is a single storey, random-rubble building constructed by John Morrell in 1836. It was the first house to be constructed in Northam, and is one of the earliest extant residences in the State.

Oldest extant residences in WA

A search of the State Heritage Office database confirms *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* to be one of the oldest extant residences in Western Australia. Only eight other extant residences (not archaeological sites or ruins) have been identified as being constructed in or before 1836. These are:

- P3065 Eacott Cottage, Mandurah (1831) – HCWA Assessment Program – A two-room limestone cottage.

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⁴⁷ ‘Recent Tour to the Eastward and Northward of Northam’, *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 18 June 1836, p 713

- Cheyne's Cottage, Albany (c.1832) [part of P54 Norman's House & Magnolia Tree and Cheyne's Cottage & Oak Tree] – Does not warrant assessment – The cottage was built of sun dried bricks with an iron roof.
- P19 *Patrick Taylor's Cottage*, Albany (1832/33) – A three-room wattle and daub cottage with shingle roof.
- P2493 *Hadrill's House*, Henley Brook (c.1835) – A brick and iron (originally thatched) cottage.
- P3855 The White House, Albany (c.1836) – HCWA Assessment Program – Mud brick four room house, now with additions.
- P1132 *Maddington Homestead* (1836) – Two storey mud brick building.
- P2588 Culham Homestead, Toodyay (1836) - HCWA Assessment Program – Mud brick dwelling with additions.
- P14880 *Gwambygine Farm and Pool*, York (1836) – Pise homestead with additions.
- P1843 *Buckland Homestead and Farm Buildings*, Northam (c.1836-) – Stone cottage, now part of two storey stone and iron residence.

First House in Northam

A search of the State Heritage Office database suggests that *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* was the first house to be constructed in Northam. Other early residences include the property built by William Childow - P3646 Springfield Estate – A two-storey residence, constructed in 1853 and demolished in 1922.⁴⁸

Another comparably early residence is *Buckland Homestead and Farm Buildings* in Irishtown, Northam. Although today the place comprises a group of buildings, the original residence – a neat stone cottage (c.1836) – remains, but is now part of the two storey main residence. It is probable that this cottage dates from a later period to *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* as the Bucklands land was not granted until August 1836 and Morby Farm Cottage had been constructed by June 1836.⁴⁹

Multi-purpose residences

Through its use as a residence as well simultaneously serving as the town's first church, first school, first courthouse, first retail outlet and first postal centre, *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* demonstrates the typical historic practice of early Western Australian settlements, where private homes were also the location of civic activities.

A search of the State Heritage Office for comparable residences which were used for other purposes, such as governmental, religious, produces few results. Comparable examples include:

The first home of the Molloy family in Augusta. The place was the home of John Molloy, the Government Resident and Resident Magistrate for the settlement of Augusta upon its establishment in 1830. The house was the place of

⁴⁸ 'Springfield Homestead', *Sunday Times*, 10 July 1921, p.13.

⁴⁹ Heritage Council of Western Australia, *State Register of Heritage Places – Assessment Documentation*, P1843 *Buckland Homestead and Farm Group* (2004), p. 4. *Garden, Northam* (1979), p. 7.

government, while Molloy was Resident Magistrate, and was also a place of worship as there was no church.⁵⁰ This place is:

- P4973 Molloy's House, Augusta (1830, demolished) - HCWA Never been reviewed.

The homes of the Turner and Bussell families in Augusta, both families were part of the original party to settle in Augusta in 1830. Both residences were also host to social gatherings which would usually take place in a community hall.⁵¹ These places are:

- P3462 Turner's Cellar and Fig Tree, Augusta (1830, formerly Turner's House only cellar remains) - HCWA Never been reviewed.
- P4937 Bussell Home Site, Augusta (1830, demolished) - HCWA Never been reviewed

The homes of the Molloy and Bussell families in Busselton. Both residences were likely used as places of worship until *St Mary's Anglican Church* was built in 1845. The Molloy's home was also the centre of government while Molloy was the district's Resident Magistrate.⁵² These places are:

- P8696 Fairlawn Dwelling (1839) – Molloy's House - A single and two-storey brick and iron dwelling and associated buildings in a farm settling. Believed to be the oldest dwelling in the Shire of Busselton. Little of the original fabric remains. HCWA Never been reviewed
- P5337 *Cattle Chosen* (1840) – Bussell's House – A two-storey wattle and daub cottage. The place is entered in the State Register.

The above demonstrates that few comparable places which were used as both a private home and as the location of civic activities remain extant in Western Australia. This early settlement there is therefore and under-represented on the State Register.

The Morrell's

John Morrell and his family have been recognised as playing a significant role in the establishment and early development of the Northam region. In addition to *Morby Farm Cottage*, the State Heritage Office database records the Morrell's as being associated with the following Places:

- P1885 *John Morrell's Grave, Northam* (1929)
- P1865 *Shamrock Hotel, Northam* (1861) – Associated with John Morrell's grandson, John Richard Morrell in 1866.
- P1891 *St John's Anglican Church & Parish Hall, Northam* (1890) – Associated with John Morrell's son Frederick.

Conclusions

The above analysis suggests that *Morby Farm Cottage* is significant as the first house to be built in Northam and as one of the oldest extant residences in Western Australia.

⁵⁰ Penelope E O'Connor, *Past Lives, Present Values: Historic Cultural Values in the South West Forest* (Perth, Curtin University: 2011), p. 173.

⁵¹ O'Connor, *Past Lives, Present Values*: (2011), pp. 173, 174.

⁵² Curtin University, *The Gulch Conservation Plan* (1999).

Its association with John Morrell, an early settler to the colony who was instrumental in the establishment of Northam through being first to settle in the region, is also significant.

13. 4 KEY REFERENCES

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

It is possible that the *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam* was originally a single room cottage dating from 1836 or before, and was later expanded to its present day size. Although there is no physical evidence to suggest that the building has been altered, the contemporary (June 1836) description of the building is vague. Further documentary research and a detailed physical analysis of the building may be able to reveal this information.

Histories note that servants, governesses and nurses (some, possibly not all) were employed at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*.⁵³ It is not known if accommodation existing for these employees on site, or whether they lived elsewhere in Northam. Further research may reveal additional information, and whether any additional accommodation buildings once existed at *Morby Farm Cottage, Northam*.

⁵³ Garden, *Northam* (1979), p. 100.