



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

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

### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

In its tranquil riverside setting, the mellow building comprising *Cooper's Mill* is highly regarded as a distance marker and orienting element in an otherwise bushland landscape of the delta. (Criterion 1.1.)

Although a low building, *Cooper's Mill* is visually significant in the estuarine landscape of the Peel Inlet at the interface with the riverine landscape, and marking one of the entrances to the Murray River. (Criterion 1.3.)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The building is an important part of the phase of the development of flour milling in the settlement of the Murray District. (Criterion 2.2)

*Cooper's Mill* is directly associated with the respected Cooper family, pioneers of the Murray District of Western Australia. The building is representative of the endeavours of a courageous young family facing the rigours and hardships of life in rural Western Australia following the early death of the patriarch of the family. The place is also associated with Josiah Stinton who was significant in early Western Australian flour milling development, being a miller of some repute who worked at William Forrest's Picton Mill and Joseph Batt's Paradise Mill. (Criterion 2.3)

*Cooper's Mill* is representative of European construction techniques translated into local materials by Cooper. The winning of the building stone from a considerable distance away, and transporting it to the island site is indicative of the difficulties experienced in its construction. (Criterion 2.4)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The close proximity of *Cooper's Mill* with its association of past human industry, to the river channels of the Murray River delta, captures the essence of the riverscape. The proximity and scale of human settlement on the riverbanks, interspersed in a bushland setting, contrasts with the vastness and

relatively featurelessness of the Peel Inlet adjoining to the west. The diversity and ambience of the building in its setting contributes generously to the sense of place of the community. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

*Cooper's Mill* is believed to be the first flour mill constructed in the district and the only one of several built contemporaneously to remain in existence. (Criterion 5.1)

The building of *Cooper's Mill* on a small island in the delta of a river is unusual in Western Australia. Its only access is by boat. It is a reflection of the past importance of waterborne transport in the settlement of Western Australia. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Cooper's Mill* with its water access, constructed in a round plan form as a rotating wind driven mill initially, and with the addition to accommodate the steam engine subsequently, is representative of flour mills of its type. (Criteria 6.1 & 6.2)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

The building is in good condition in 1996.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The stone wall is authentic but it has been rendered, the floor has been removed and the brick addition has been rebuilt. The integrity of the building is low to moderate.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

The extent of original fabric in the building cannot be precisely determined, but the form is considered to be authentic to the period of ownership by the Cooper family.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary and physical evidence has been compiled by John Pidgeon and David Kelsall, Architects.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

A number of flour mills were constructed in the 1840s. The earliest, commenced by Cooper is the only one in the district to survive.

Joseph Cooper and Elizabeth Cooper arrived in the colony aboard the *Warrior* in 1830 with four of their eight children, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Joseph and Mary Anne. Joseph, believed to be a wheelwright, and his son commenced building a windmill in 1843 'for grinding wheat at Windmill Point on an island at the mouth of the Murray River where it enters Peel Inlet.'

The family was entitled to grants of 840 acres. Some town allotments were taken up in Fremantle and a further 675 acre block in the Murray District was taken up for the family farm. In addition, the family took up land on an island for the mill and leased a 10 acre block in the centre of the island. A house was built facing the main channel of the river, not far from the mill. Cooper did most of the work himself and may have built the mill machinery out of tuart. He left the running of the family farm (Redcliffe) to his eldest son. It is said the stone for construction of the mill was brought across the estuary by boat, Cooper sailing across on the easterly wind in the morning and returning in the early afternoon on the sea breeze.

The winning of the stone for the mill wall must have been an enormous task and tested the resources of the family. The nearest likely source of stone is at a distance of at least 15 km each way. Examination of the nautical charts indicates the presence of a narrow and tortuous channel to be negotiated with extremely shallow water flanking the quarry sites along the eastern shore of the estuary, a factor which would have made loading the stone an onerous task. Entrance to the Murray River from the Peel Inlet is also very shallow and the narrow channel would have been kept open manually. Further, it is most likely the size of vessel used by Cooper and its loading capacity would have been limited by the water depth available in Peel Inlet.

Joseph Sr. died following a cart accident in 1847 and his son Joseph Jr, then about twenty, was left the family property (Redcliffe) in Pinjarra. The mill at Yunderup was left to his younger brothers, Thomas and James, Joseph Jr's brothers born in the colony. Their mother, Elizabeth was to be paid £15 per year out of the profits of the farm.

The boys completed the mill with the help of Dan Myerick, a carpenter, and Josiah Stinton. The mill was in use by 1850.

Initially, Richards asserts it is possible that the mill was operated by sail and that these were destroyed by bushfire. The roof section had been made to rotate to the wind. Business was apparently brisk, and the wind power was inadequate for the demand. In the early 1860s, the mill was converted to steam power by the addition of a room built on the south side of the mill. In the floods of 1862, the newly installed steam plant was awash and the mill suffered the loss of flour and grain.

For a time, the mill was well placed to receive wheat from the settlers; however, the bulk of the grain producing country was centred further inland and by 1865, *Cooper's Mill* closed down and the machinery was sold to Captain Fawcett for his small mill at Pinjarra. The mill building languished unused for years and was later used as a smoke house for the curing of fish. The family leased the whole island as a stock run prior to the 1880s, eventually abandoning the lease for better pastures elsewhere.

The abandoned house and mill were pillaged for their materials. Around the beginning of the twentieth century the mill housed a recluse. Carelessly lit fires resulted in the destruction of the stairs and lower floor timbers, the building suffered further from fire before being restored by Reg Cooper and the WA Historical Society in 1930. It was again restored in 1984 by the Federal Government, the Peel Inlet Management Authority and the Murray Shire Council.

The mill originally had five sails. Its walls are currently cement rendered limestone with a limestone rubble floor. The mill and brick extension have sheet roof cladding.

Josiah Stinton who helped the Cooper boys complete the mill, was born in 1824 and arrived in the colony aboard the *Henry* in April 1841. He married Susannah Willey in 1852 and they had at least seven children. He was a stonemason and builder in the 1840s, and was indentured to Wollaston. Stinton later became a mill wheelwright (Fremantle) and then moved to Bunbury where he was a miller. He is recorded as active in the Pinjarra and Balingup Districts. He was important in early Western Australian flour milling development, being a miller of some repute who worked at William Forrest's Picton Mill and Joseph Batt's Paradise Mill.

Stinton worked at the mill at Picton after leaving Wollaston's employ, and *Cooper's Mill* for some time, teaching the boys the finer points of the trade.

In his journals, Wollaston described Stinton, at the time working with Forrest, as having 'become also an excellent mechanic, and is doing well.' A later reference probably also refers to J Stinton - 'T Hinton is the miller on the estuary (at Bunbury) - married and doing well - but he did not come to church to meet his old master.'

Dan Myerick ran the Mandurah Ferry Service in the 1840s and left the colony in 1852.

The place was entered into the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission in September 1984 and classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) in June 1996. The place is vested in the Shire of Murray.

## 13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The mill is located near Windmill Point on the extreme north western end of Cooleenup Island, the northernmost island of the group comprising the delta of the Murray River where it enters Peel Inlet, an estuary that reaches the Indian Ocean via Mandurah Estuary and the Dawesville Cut. Being a delta, the soil is alluvial. Characteristically, rivers deposit silt where they enter large, still bodies of water, making navigation difficult. This setting is no exception. The water depth at the mouth of the Murray River is shallow, and the need for attention to the maintenance of the river channels is constant. Fine stands of timber on the delta islands make a wonderful habitat for birdlife, and the river and estuary shallows provide an abundance of fishing. The delta has high recreation values.

Access to the *Cooper's Mill* site on Cooleenup Island is only by boat. The island is relatively flat with steep banks to the river. The mill was constructed near the water's edge in two stages, the first being an eight metre diameter two-storey cylindrical tower constructed from rough limestone blocks, now rendered externally. The wall is 900mm thick. The floor is limestone rubble. There is a door on the west at ground level and a window on the north and south side of the upper level.

The tower was originally capped with a rotating roof turned by means of a beam at ground level. A gutter marking the extremity of the rotating beam is said to be discernible around the building.

Early photographs depict a shingle roof to this section. It is understood the original mill machinery was constructed of timber by Cooper.

Transformation of the motive power from wind to steam resulted in the need to extend the building to accommodate the steam engine. The second stage is around three metres square with a door on the north side and a verandah to the north, east and south. The walls are of clay brick laid in Flemish bond.

## 13. 3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition 1996.

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet.

- <sup>1</sup> References used in compiling the Documentary Evidence are as follows:  
Battye Library documents concerning the Will of Joseph Cooper, Acc. 636A.  
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