



# 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

*The Cliffe* demonstrates a consistent level of intact quality period detailing in both its external and internal construction. (Criterion 1.2)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*The Cliffe* was one of the first houses built in Peppermint Grove, and has a close association with the subsequent subdivision of McNeil Street and the development of the suburb (Criteria 2.1, 2.2)

*The Cliffe* has a close associations with both the prominent McNeil and Brisbane families (owners), and with J. Talbot Hobbs (architect). (Criterion 2.3)

*The Cliffe* demonstrates a rare use of timber weatherboard for the construction of a residence of its size and scale. (Criterion 2.4)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*The Cliffe* is held in high regard by residents in the area. A petition containing a number of signatures was raised, in 1995, to support the retention of the place. (Criterion 4.1)

As one of the first 'gentleman's' residences in the suburb, *The Cliffe* contributes to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1 RARITY**

*The Cliffe* is a rare example in metropolitan Perth of a substantial weatherboard 'gentleman's' residence, which has, intact, the subsidiary buildings of coachhouse, stables, summerhouse, servants cottages, and part of the original gardens. (Criterion 5.1)

### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*The Cliffe* demonstrates the domestic life of a wealthy society family at the turn of the century. The design, configuration and detailing of the property, including the extant associated out-buildings, remain intact, and are representative of the lifestyle and activities originally conducted on the site. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12.3 CONDITION**

A few structural problems have been identified in the site report, but generally the condition of the fabric of *The Cliffe* is sound.

For further information see the Site Inspection Report by Ian Hocking: Hocking Planning and Architecture 'The Cliffe - Peppermint Grove: Outcomes from Site Inspection'. (August 1995).

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*The Cliffe* continues to be used as a residence, the purpose for which it was originally built. The intact nature of the buildings, including the house, coachhouse, stables, summerhouse, servants cottages, and part of the original gardens means that *The Cliffe* retains a high degree of integrity.

For further information see the Site Inspection Report by Ian Hocking: Hocking Planning and Architecture 'The Cliffe - Peppermint Grove : Outcomes from Site Inspection'. (August 1995).

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

The place retains a large number of original components dating from either the first (1894) or the second (1898) stage of construction. The extensions and additions which have been made in subsequent years, including some elements of redecoration, do not compromise the authenticity of the place as a whole. Generally, *The Cliffe* retains a high degree of authenticity.

For further information see the Site Inspection Report by Ian Hocking: Hocking Planning and Architecture 'The Cliffe - Peppermint Grove : Outcomes from Site Inspection'. (August 1995).

## 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*The Cliffe*, in Bindaring Parade, Peppermint Grove, is a bungalow built, predominantly, of jarrah and 'finished off with imported wrought iron railing'.<sup>1</sup>

The original owner of *The Cliffe* was Neil McNeil, who purchased the land in 1892 - only one year after Peppermint Grove was surveyed into building allotments<sup>2</sup>. McNeil lived at *The Cliffe* from 1894 until his death in 1927.<sup>3</sup>

Neil McNeil, an experienced engineer and railway contractor, came to Western Australia from Victoria in 1872 to construct the Jarrahdale to Bunbury railway line. With his brother and several other men, he took over the Jarrahdale Timber Company 'and opened up the W. A. timber trade in the London markets', exporting timber for the paving of London Streets.<sup>4</sup> This company later became part of Millars Timber and Trading Company.<sup>5</sup> At the time of the construction of *The Cliffe*, McNeil was a successful businessman with interests in rail, mining in Kalgoorlie and Ravensthorpe, orchards in Mt. Barker, and statewide real estate. He owned *Surrey Chambers* and *McNeil's Building* in Perth, *Phillimore Chambers* in Fremantle, and buildings in the goldfields. He invested his own funds into the construction of the Perth Water Supply Scheme and also dabbled in the lucrative, if somewhat socially risky, real estate of Roe Street, Perth.<sup>6</sup>

Because of his strong business interest in timber and his conviction of its suitability as a building material, McNeil built his home as a showpiece. Nearly twenty years after its construction *The Cliffe* was described as follows:

From the substantial foundation to the shingle roof every part of the structure is of jarrah, and after nearly twenty years - the house having been built in 1894 - every plank and beam and joist remain in as sound condition as when first they were cut to the contractor's design. Over twenty rooms are roofed beneath these jarrah shingles, and the interior is fitted up with all that art and comfort can suggest, while surrounding the house is a park of ten acres, tastefully laid out with lawns and flower-beds, and further beautified by the introduction of decorative statuary in bronze, collected by Mr McNeil on various trips to England and the Continent.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, McNeil's vision of majestic timber houses, rather than houses constructed of brick and stone, was not shared by the Peppermint Grove Road Board which later legislated against timber construction in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Pascoe, R. *Western Australia's Capital Suburb: Peppermint Grove* (Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Title Deeds indicate that in 1892 McNeil owned Lots 23, 24, 25, 26 & 27 of Section XIV, together with lot 25 of Section XIII, and the carriageway between them (McNeil Street). In 1895 McNeil, in a series of purchases, bought up all the lots of Section XIV.

<sup>3</sup> Tweedie, F. 'Biography of Neil McNeil', a biography compiled by Fiona Tweedie - McNeil's great niece - 1977 no pagination. (BL PR8679PEP)

<sup>4</sup> Stannage, C.T. *The People of Perth. A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City* (Perth, 1979) p. 228; Battye, J. S. *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, Vol II, (Hesperian Press, 1913) p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> Tweedie, no pagination.

<sup>6</sup> Battye, pp. 290-291; Pascoe, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Battye, pp. 292-293.

Single storey limestone built bungalows remained the norm. The only other timber houses in Peppermint Grove 'were the poorer residences clustered along Johnston Street'.<sup>8</sup>

Research so far conducted has not conclusively revealed who originally designed and built the residence and associated buildings, nor when. Fiona Tweedie, McNeil's grand niece, states that McNeil built *The Cliffe* himself in 1894.<sup>9</sup> McNeil was a major building contractor and therefore this is likely. An 1896 map of Peppermint Grove and surrounding suburbs shows 'McNeil Street'. A real estate plan, dated February 1897, shows McNeil's name on the site of *The Cliffe*, and Wisers Post Office Directory of 1896-1897 lists Neil McNeil as living in Peppermint Grove.<sup>10</sup> There is also photographic evidence, taken in 1898, showing a substantial residence.<sup>11</sup>

Tweedie states that the original house was soon extended: 'At first it was a bachelor establishment with 15 rooms but he added to it on his marriage in 1899 to Jessie Alexandra Lawrie'.<sup>12</sup> Various sources credit J. Talbot Hobbs with the design and indicate the date of construction as circa 1898. The Talbot Hobbs practice ledgers for the period 1892 to 1900 do not list any work undertaken on McNeil's residence.<sup>13</sup> However, an inventory of Talbot Hobb's' buildings, compiled from three ledgers kept by Talbot Hobbs in his home in Peppermint Grove, indicates that in the period 1899-1900 he was associated with the McNeil residence: 'what was on the corner of the Esplanade and McNeil Street, now in McNeil Street'.<sup>14</sup>

The McNeils entertained frequently, and the expanded *The Cliffe* boasted a billiard room, tennis court, croquet lawn, extensive planted gardens and a summer house. Curving around the house were a long driveway, various flower beds, a tennis court, a summer house, stables and other outbuildings, and cottages for the staff. McNeil's staff included two gardeners and a chauffeur, for McNeil owned one of the first motor cars in Western Australia.

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*The Cliffe's* extensive grounds provided space for McNeil and his wife to exercise their horses. Boy Scouts were allowed to camp in the grounds and Mrs McNeil supported the Red Cross sewing circle by holding their meetings in the billiard room of the house.<sup>16</sup> In 1915, McNeil subdivided part of his property into twenty lots which were auctioned on 4 November by auctioneers Learmonth Duffy and Company. The subdivision was bordered by McNeil Street and the Perth-Fremantle Road (now Stirling Highway) and

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8 Pascoe, p. 57.

9 Tweedie, no pagination.

10 Wisers's West Australian Post Office Directory, 1896-97 (994); Peppermint Grove 1896, (Map 223C); Real Estate plan 78c/F3 (607).

11 Photographs of tennis party: 21 October 1898 (BL5395B/3); 27 December 1898 (BL 5395B/4)

12 Tweedie, no pagination.

13 Talbot Hobbs Ledger Books, WA State Archives, 2780A/1-3

14 Macauley, C. R. 'Joseph John Talbot Hobbs' (BL - PR14514HOB)

Battye Library has an architectural drawing by Edward Dean Smith for a proposed McNeil Residence in Peppermint Grove, however the drawing does not include a site plan and there is no reference to an address. Further more, the details indicate the proposed residence was to be of brick construction; therefore this drawing is unlikely to be connected to *The Cliffe*.

15 Pascoe, p. 63.

16 *ibid.*

contributed to the development of the urban form of the northern part of Peppermint Grove as it is currently known.<sup>17</sup>

McNeil died, childless, in 1927, his wife left *The Cliffe* to live with her sisters, and the property was sold to Hugh Lance Brisbane.<sup>18</sup> Lance Brisbane, as he was known, was a prominent West Australian industrialist who chaired many companies, notably H. L. Brisbane and Wunderlich Ltd., as well as being President of the Asthma Foundation of W. A.<sup>19</sup> He received an MBE in 1951, and was knighted in 1960.<sup>20</sup>

In 1933, Lance Brisbane moved to a house in Johnston Street and his brother, David William, moved into *The Cliffe*. David Brisbane was also a prominent member of Perth society. He was the Managing Director of Fogden, Brisbane and Co. Ltd. and was the chairman of a number of corporations and on the board of his brother's company.<sup>21</sup>

David Brisbane, and his family, lived at *The Cliffe* until his death in 1960. In 1962, the property was subdivided into six lots by Cotswald Investments Pty. Ltd., which retained one lot and sold the other five. The central lot, containing the house, was passed in at auction, although one of the other lots achieved a price of £8,900, which set a 'metropolitan record for a single unit vacant residential lot'.<sup>22</sup>

Dr Harold McComb, a prominent plastic surgeon, subsequently purchased *The Cliffe* and lived there until April 1995. *The Cliffe* is presently unoccupied. [Further research is needed]

### 13. 2. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The previous physical evidence in this documentation is superseded by the report prepared for the Heritage Council by Ian Hocking, Hocking Planning and Architecture, in August 1995.

### 13. 3 REFERENCES

- Battye, J. S. (ed) *Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, 2 Vols., (1912-13) (Perth, Hesperian Press)  
Pascoe, R. *Western Australia's Capital Suburb: Peppermint Grove* (Oxford University Press, 1983)  
National Trust Assessment Exposition (12 September 1983)  
HCWA Site Particulars Form (3 April 1995)

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> *West Australian Telephone Directory* (BL - Q384.6WES)

<sup>19</sup> *West Australian* 20 August 1962, p. 7f.

<sup>20</sup> *West Australian Telephone Directory* (BL - Q384.6WES)

<sup>21</sup> *Countryman* 4 August 1960, p. 3e.

<sup>22</sup> *West Australian* 20 August 1962, p. 7f.