

NAME: Eltham Community Centre, trees

TYPE: TREES

SITE NUMBER: 165

ADDRESS off MAIN ROAD ELTHAM

MELWAY MAP: 21 J6 DATE: 1977-8, 1920s



PLANNING SCHEME OVERLAY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Planning scheme protection Recommended External paint controls
Tree control Outbuilding control Internal alteration control

HERITAGE VALUE Regional

ELTHAM STUDY CRITERIA:

THEME(S), LANDSCAPE

ELTHAM STUDY THEMES:

PRIVATE/PUBLIC PLANTING

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Whitford and Peck, Peter Glass and Dennis Edwards, aided by Bob Grant

REVISED ELTHAM STUDY EXTENT OF DESIGNATION:

ENTIRE BUILDING, ALL MATURE EXOTIC PLANTING, WHEEL RIM TOOL AND LAND WITHIN THE TITLE TO A RADIUS OF 30 METRES

ELTHAM STUDY HISTORY:

Original and Continuing Use: Community Centre

Architects: Whitford and Peck{ Marshall}

Eltham Community Centre, trees

The Eltham Community Centre was opened by the then Shire President, Mr. Robert Marshall. { Marshall } The building union concerns with the weight of the mud bricks were removed by retaining the traditional height and width, but halving their depth and thus weight. { Marshall } The wheel rim tool was installed in the grounds in recent years to ensure its preservation.

REVISED HISTORY:

The Eltham Community Centre has been described as 'exceptional on the score of scale' by writer Ted Howard who has surveyed earth buildings nationally. When it was built in 1978 it was the largest earth building in Australia: this has since been surpassed by a hotel in Queensland and the Baptist Church in Plenty. The construction cost of around \$500,000 was considered by Howard to be exceptional value given the two halls able to seat 550, with bio boxes and dressing rooms for both cinema and live production. The construction was square section Oregon posts and Oregon beams with about 66,000 pressed earth bricks laid between. The weight limit for each brick was 13.6Kg (which also applied to clay and concrete masonry) because of health and safety consideration put forward by the bricklayers union. A typical mud brick would weigh 23 Kg so the size was reduced to 380x125x125mm { Howard: 106}.

The design was by Whitford and Peck and the landscaping around the building was carried out by Peter Glass and Dennis Edwards, aided by Bob Grant, using mainly native plants { Howard: 106}.

The blacksmith's shop was in main Road opposite Pitt Street: the building is pictured in 1923 as a gabled corrugated iron clad with a loft and double ledge & braced entry doors. The image has the blacksmith Sid Brown in front of the shop. The wheel rim is said to have come from this shop. A nearby plaque erected in 1985 by the Eltham Historical Society states that this part of Main Road was known as Maria Street and was the main commercial strip. The tyre rim and associated tyreing disk implement were found on the site.

ELTHAM STUDY DESCRIPTON:

Building

Style Eltham Style.

Design unique.

Plan polygonal.

Single storeyed.

Walls cavity adobe, timber? framed?.

Roof pitched.

Features are the design of the building, construction using exposed timber framing and solid walls, various roof shapes and the diagonally glazed western end.

The Community Centre is arguably the Shire's finest adobe public building in the Eltham style. The use of the combination of mud brick, exposed feature timber framing and creative design is characteristic of the innovative buildings and the social movement behind them that exemplifies Eltham in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s and is termed by this Study (Eltham Heritage Study) the Eltham style. The very unusual, if not unique, cavity adobe wall construction was the result of the building unions not being prepared to construct the building using the traditional single thickness mud brick, due to its weight { Marshall}.

Peppercorn tree

(located on Main Road verge, approx 50m north)

This tree is located amongst other trees, including other Peppercorns, in a grassed area at the front of the site. It has two co-joined trunks growing from the one base which is within 300MM of the trunk of a tall Bhutan Cypress ('Cupressus torulosa'). The

Peppercorn is quite large, being 10-12 Metres in height and having a trunk diameter of 700-800MM approximately. It is in good condition and has only a small amount of dead wood in the canopy.

REVISED OR EXTENDED DESCRIPTION:

The trees (intertwined pepper and cypress trees) described in the Eltham Heritage Study are well removed from this site, being to the north on the Main Road verge. It is likely that the cypress was planted and the pepper tree has absorbed it at a later date.

The trees on and nearer the site include a group (3) of mature pepper trees close to Main Road near the wheel rim. There are others along the frontage of the public land which were presumably part of the former farmland. There is another group near the current library close to Shillinglaw's Cottage. There are immature pepper trees (2) on the north and east side of the centre, close to the walls. Between them is a 'Cupressus sp.' ('C. lusitanica'?). Nearby is the significant oak row next to the rugby field. A mature 'Cedrus deodara' is in a planting bed near the car park (c1920s-30s?).

'Schinus molle' var. 'areira'

This fast-growing tree with graceful, drooping leaves and branchlets develops an attractive, gnarled trunk as it ages to a height of 30-50 ft (9-15 m). The dark green, shiny leaves are 6 in (15 cm) long, composed of 10 to 18 pairs of small pointed leaflets; they are resinous and aromatic when crushed. Pendulous clusters of tiny cream flowers appear from late spring to early summer. Decorative sprays of tiny rose-pink berries follow- these have a peppery taste and have been used like pepper, but are somewhat toxic. In hot dry climates it naturalizes readily and may become a weed' { Botanica}.

Condition: Externally good (partially disturbed, well preserved)

Integrity Externally substantially intact/some intrusions

ELTHAM STUDY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Community Centre is arguably the Shire's finest adobe public building in the Eltham style. The use of the combination of mud brick, exposed feature timber framing and creative design is characteristic of the innovative buildings and the social movement behind them that exemplifies Eltham in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s and is termed by this Study the Eltham style. The very unusual, if not unique, cavity adobe wall construction was the result of the building unions not being prepared to construct the building using the traditional single thickness mud brick, due to its weight { Marshall}. The mature exotic site planting illustrates earlier land use in a part of Eltham that was one of the first to be settled. The Peppercorn tree is a large and good example of this species.

The wooden spoked wheel rim tool illustrates a technology that was an important part of life during the horse-powered age and since almost completely disappeared, along with the nearby blacksmith's shop that housed it previously.

REVISED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (with AHC criteria)

Eltham Community Centre is significant to the Greater Melbourne region:

- as the largest earth building in Australia when completed in 1978 (Criterion B2);
- as one of the Shire's finest adobe public buildings in what has been termed the Eltham style (Criterion F1);
- for the uncommon cavity adobe wall construction and brick size, as a creative response to health and safety consideration for building workers (Criterion F1);
- as a reflection of the strong influence of adobe construction and its aesthetic in the Shire in that period, meaning in this case its choice for a public building which would typically have been clad with commercially manufactured concrete or clay masonry (Criterion A4);
- for its community role over a long period (Criterion G1) .

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The associated pepper trees and cedar (mature exotics) are locally significant (along with other tree groups on Eltham Common) as remnants from the former farm use of the land (Criterion A4).

The iron wheel rim and tiring disk are locally significant as rare artefacts of past travel methods and land use in the area (Criterion A4).

ELTHAM STUDY REFERENCES:

Information from Mr. R. Marshall, who opened it
Old photograph in ELHPC, no. 753

FURTHER REFERENCES:

Howard, T. 1992, 'Mud and Man'

QUERIES RESOLVED:

History, sources?