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Geraldton Lighthouses

Maritime Heritage Site Inspection Report

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Introduction

The purpose of this site inspection was to make a preliminary assessment of the remains of the Bluff Point lighthouses and the historical background of the Point Moore lighthouse.

Background

Technical Data

Date of Inspection: 20 July 1995

Approximate Locations: Both sites are within the City of Geraldton on Champion Bay.

Charts: Aus 332, Quobba Point to Geraldton, Southern Sheet. 1972. 1 : 300,000.
Aus 81, Approaches to Geraldton. 1983. 1 : 25,000.

Directions: Both sites are easily accessible being within the City of Geraldton and close to major roads.

Site Condition and Integrity: The tower and lighthouse keeper's cottage of the upper light of the Bluff Point lights remains in very good condition having been granted to the Geraldton Historical Society as their headquarters. Restoration was carried out in the 1970s and maintenance continues.

The lower light on the beach was gutted by fire in 1952 and the stone has now been used in a memorial seat at the site.

Point Moore lighthouse is currently still working as an unmanned, automatic lighthouse and receives regular maintenance.

Management Considerations

All structures are maintained by the relevant owners and can be expected to be properly cared for in the foreseeable future.

Description of Sites

The Bluff Point Light consists of a stone light tower with attached lighthouse keeper's cottage in stone with corrugated iron roof.

The Point Moore Light is an iron tower prefabricated in England and assembled at Point Moore commencing in 1878. The original three stone lighthouse keeper's cottages were demolished in 1926 and the replacement timber framed cottage is now used by a commercial business.

Site Identification Comments

The Bluff Point lights were the first operational lights in Champion Bay and were the leading lights for entry to the bay through the many surrounding reefs. They were lit on 23 October 1876 and became automatic in 1943 when they were converted to electricity. The original cost of the two lights was £4,000 which also included the keeper's cottage. The first keeper, John Kelly, was paid £70 per year for his services.

The Point Moore light was a replacement for a tower built on Flagstaff Hill. This hill was levelled to provide harbour fill during the 1930s, and no part of the structure remains. Stone from the tower was used in the construction of public buildings. This was a result of the tower being erected by mistake in the wrong position, an error discovered by Navigating Lieutenant Archdeacon R.N. in 1874, before the placement of the light. The tower for the current Point Moore light was prefabricated in Birmingham. The base of the new lighthouse was built in the wrong position in 1877. This necessitated resiting it to the present position and the lighthouse was finally erected in 1878. The first lights consisted of a revolving white light below which was a fixed red light. This latter, with its balcony, was later removed. The original kerosene wick lamps were replaced by incandescent mantle lamps in 1911. These were later electrified and the light is now automated and still functioning. It appears that because of the errors made in the positioning of firstly the original tower and then the foundation of the Point Moore light, the cost rose from an estimate of £4,000 - £5,000 to about £14,000.

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Associated Shipwrecks

Flying Foam

This 33 ton schooner departed Champion Bay on 6 March 1872 and was sighted by the cutter *May* west of Champion Bay and shaping her course for Fremantle. The *Flying Foam* disappeared and no trace of her was found despite searches of the Abrolhos and the mainland. She was presumably overwhelmed in a gale from the north-west on 10 March 1872.

African

The *African*, a 780 ton ship, was enroute from Champion Bay to Fremantle when she began taking water. On 4 January 1863 she turned about to return to the Bay as heavy weather was exacerbating the problem. A few hours later she touched a reef (now called African Reef) some 10.5 nautical miles south of where the Point Moore light now stands. The ship managed to sail back and ran aground in Champion Bay. The cargo of 522 tons of copper and lead ore and over 300 bales of wool was off-loaded and the vessel abandoned as a constructive total loss. She dragged her anchor and finished up off the mouth of the Chapman River. Auctions were held to sell the ship and among the buyers

was William Garrard, shipwright, who bought some of the timbers. From these he built the cutters *Albatross*, *Lass of Geraldton* and *Mary Ann*.

Mayhill

The *Mayhill*, a four-masted barque was wrecked near the entrance to the channel into Champion Bay on 10 August 1895. The 2,027 ton vessel was attempting to enter the port with a cargo of 2947 tons of railway lines for the Mullewa to Cue railway. The reason for the wrecking was that the sailing directions supplied to the captain were incorrect in their description of the Bluff Point Leading lights. The Captain realised his error but too late for his evasive action to clear the reef. This incident was the catalyst in the port of Geraldton obtaining a long overdue Pilot to bring ships safely to harbour.

Arab

On 12 October 1921 Geraldton was struck by a severe storm during which this 120 ton schooner broke her mooring and was driven ashore between Point Moore and Bluff Point lights.

Flora Dora

28 foot fishing boat wrecked a few miles north of Geraldton on 24 July 1924 with the loss of both of the two men on board.

Ocean Queen

40 foot fishing boat sank in the harbour in 1925 after snapping her mooring.

Rosella

On 8 August 1928 the lugger *Rosella* from Broome sailed straight onto the rocks of the breakwater and was wrecked.

References

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Assessment of Site Significance

(1) Historical: Both the Point Moore and Bluff Point lights are extremely significant in the growth of Champion Bay/ Geraldton as a major port. It was because of its superiority as a port over Port Gregory that the town and port were founded.

(2) Technological: The Bluff Point Light is representative of the stone light towers and attached cottages of the period.

Point Moore light is of significance because of its prefabricated, iron structure.

(3) Cultural: Both these structures have played a vital role in the growth and prosperity of the port. Both are still being used and will continue to be used in the foreseeable future.

(4) Educational: These sites have educational potential particularly as the Bluff Point light is the current repository of the Geraldton Historical Society's archives. Both buildings have intimate links with the town's heritage and history.

Recommendations

That both sites be gazetted as Historic Sites in association with the history of the port of Geraldton and the history and growth of the hinterland which the port services.

Peter Worsley