

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** AITKEN'S WATTLE & DAUB COTTAGE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** 57 Bell Street PENS HurST

**STUDY NUMBER:** 254

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE:** EALES' COTTAGE

**PRECINCT:** Penshurst

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 3      **SECTION:** 15      **PARISH:** PARISH OF YALIMBA

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 475J C11; VicRoads 233 O11; located on the south side of Bell Street, in between French & Scales Streets in the centre of the township.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** State



Aitkin's Wattle and Daub Cottage, 57 Bell St, Penshurst

**Image Date:** 22/04/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the house and all of the land.

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Aitken's wattle and daub cottage is located at 57 Bell Street, Penshurst, about 300 metres east of the Penshurst Post Office. The cottage consists of two structures built side by side with a link. The earlier section, on the east side, consists of two rooms with a central passage and an adjoining kitchen under a skillion roof. There are massive bluestone chimneys in the sitting room and kitchen. The external and internal walls of this section are made of wattle and daub, samples of which are still visible inside. The roof is hipped and continuous, at a lower pitch over the verandah. Beneath the modern corrugated iron roof are timber 'in the round' rafters. A small area of roof under the verandah retains the original shingles. The exterior and interior surfaces of the wattle and daub walls have been clad at some time in the 20th century with fibro-cement sheeting. The sheeting has been removed in the front bedroom and on one wall of the living room to expose the original building fabric. A very small area of the daub in the living room has been removed to expose the wattles. A bathroom has been added during the 20th century beside the kitchen, and it has been remodelled in the 1980s.

The later, western section, dating from about the 1870s, is a timber framed weatherboard building of one room with a skillion addition. The hipped roof is corrugated iron. The main room in this section contains a large fireplace and chimney of dressed bluestone. A further living room has been added in the 1970s at the rear of this section. The verandah passes in front of both sections and the gap between has been enclosed.

The house is situated to the rear of a large allotment facing the main street of Penshurst. Until the mid 20th century, a tannery building was located at the front of the block.

## HISTORY:

In 1855 the allotments relating to the property were bought by D. O'Neil. In 1864, the first rate book for the Shire of Mount Rouse lists the property owner as C Aitken, and the occupier Robert Aitken, of '2 acres land, slab house, etc, Penshurst'. It is believed that this is the wattle and daub house at 57 Bell Street. In 1873 the Shire's valuation book lists Robert Aitken senior and Thomas Aitken, tanners, as the occupiers of a tannery and house at Penshurst, owned by Aitken and Son. The 1888 rate book shows Robert Aitken junior, tanner, as the occupier of the property owned by the executors of the late Robert Aitken. The tannery is specifically located on Allotment 3 Section 15.

For many years the younger Robert Aitken is listed as the owner and occupier of a house, tannery, premises and Allotment 1, part Allotments 2-3, Allotments 4-8 and Allotment 10 of Section 15, Penshurst. He acquired other properties in the Penshurst area, which may be an indicator of his growing prosperity. He also entered into partnerships with other merchants to own and/or occupy several premises, including the Temperance Hall in Watton Street. In 1913 he held the office of Secretary of the Board of Managers of the Presbyterian Church. He was a Shire of Mount Rouse councillor from 1920 to 1927.

In about 1926 the elderly Aitken moved to Melbourne, and the old house and tannery were sold to William Ambrose Kelly, dealer. During Kelly's ownership, references to the property as a tannery disappear from the rate books. Frederick Eales purchased the house and land Allotments 1-4 in 1939. Subsequently the property remained in the Eales family for many decades. At some stage the former tannery building, which fronted Bell Street, was demolished.

Aitken's cottage is believed to be the oldest surviving house in Penshurst. In 1914 the Penshurst Free Press, in an obituary for Mr. Frank Liles Olle, who arrived in Penshurst in 1858, referred to Aitken's cottage as '[t]he only house now standing that existed at that time is the old residence of Mr. Robert Aitken'

## THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3 Developing local, regional and national economies

3.14 Developing an Australian engineering and construction industry

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3.14.1 Building to suit Australian conditions

3.14.1 Using Australian materials in construction

Theme 4 Building settlements, towns and cities

Theme 8 Developing Australia's cultural life

8.12 Living in and around Australian homes

## **CONDITION:**

The condition of all sections of the building is very good.

## **INTEGRITY:**

High degree of integrity throughout.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

Aitken's wattle and daub cottage, located at 57 Bell Street Penshurst is a modest dwelling constructed in two stages. The earlier section was built about 1855 using vernacular building techniques including wattle and daub construction. While the corrugated iron roof over the 1855 section is modern, the timber 'in the round' rafters, and remaining hand split shingles belong to this early vernacular structure. The external and internal walls have been clad in fibro-cement sheeting, concealing and protecting the wattle and daub fabric. The later, adjoining structure, probably built in the 1870s, is a simple timber building of one principal room, with a modern addition at the rear. The massive fireplaces in both sections are made of bluestone.

The position of the house at the rear of the large block is a legacy of the demolished tannery, which operated for at least fifty years at the front of the block facing the main street of Penshurst.

How is it significant?

Aitken's wattle and daub cottage is of historical and architectural significance to the township of Penshurst and the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

Aitken's wattle and daub cottage is of historical significance as the oldest surviving residence in Penshurst. It dates from the earliest land sales in the area, following the closure of the Mount Rouse Aboriginal Protectorate. The house and the now demolished tannery were associated for about 70 years with the pioneering Aitken family. The retention of the humble house with its vernacular construction techniques is historically significant, reflecting the desire of the Aitken family to retain the structure at a time when their wealth and social status increased considerably. The house and tannery complex has historical significance for its associations with the development of industry and commerce in Penshurst. It has further historical significance for its long occupancy by Robert Aitken, civic leader, and local councillor for many years, and later occupancy by the Kelly and Eales families, who were early settlers in the district.

Aitken's wattle and daub cottage is of architectural significance as a rare surviving example of vernacular building techniques, including wattle and daub walls, timber 'in the round' rafters, and a few remaining hand split roof shingles. The high degree of integrity of the fabric of this early dwelling reflects its history of regular maintenance and improvements, and uninterrupted use as a family home.

## **COMPARISON:**

260 Burger's Cottages (Acacia), Penshurst-Macarthur Road, Penshurst

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**ASSESSED BY:** tfh

**EXISTING LISTINGS:**

**HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Include in VHR**  **Include in RNE**  **Include in Local Planning Scheme**

**No Recommendations for Inclusions**

**REFERENCES:**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Page</b>
Miles Lewis	Victorian Primitive	1977	
Mount Rouse Shire Council	Shire of Mount Rouse, In the Centre of the Fertile Western District of Victoria: Centenary Celebrated	1966	
Penshurst Free Press	Frank Liles Olle Obituary, March 14	1914	2
Shire of Mount Rouse	Rate Books, various years		

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