

South.  
Australian  
Heritage  
Act  
78-80

# HERITAGE SURVEY ITEM IDENTIFICATION SHEET

PROJECT  
HERITAGE SURVEY REGION 4  
Item Ref. No. 236

ITEM NAME: Former Bassett's School  
Former or other

Office Use  
ITEM No.  
DOCKET No.

DESCRIPTION: The attractive stone building has retained its slate roof and small paned windows. Despite its changes of use, some interior fittings and the original slate floor have survived.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY: Lot 25 was sold by Webb and Jerningham to James Bailey Bassett for £23.0.0 in October 1857. Bassett had previously opened a school for boys and girls at nearby Buckland House (lots 26 and 27) in 1847. In 1851 his first wife died and, 2 years later, he married Mary Murrell who apparently took over the teaching of the girls. The school was successful, enabling the Bassetts to finance a new, purpose-built schoolroom on lot 25 by 1862.

"Amongst the many buildings erected lately in the township the new schoolroom of Mr. Bassett occupies a very prominent position, both as to site and character, and is an ornament to the east end of the town. It is strictly a private venture of the worthy owner, being built wholly at his expense. It is reported that there will be an inauguration of the school in a few days, on which occasion Mr. Bassett will deliver a lecture. I hope to see it numerously attended as a mark of respect most justly his due."1  
The boys were shifted to this new schoolroom, and both schools flourished so that by 1874 there were 87 boys and 63 girls on the attendance roll. The Bassetts involved themselves and their charges in community affairs and

PTO

LOCATION  
Address St. Luke St.,  
Town Willunga  
Postcode  
Section 258  
Hundred Willunga  
County  
L.G.A. Willunga  
S.H.P. Region 4  
A.M.G. Ref. 6627-III

SUBJECT  
2.6  
3.3

USE

PERIOD  
State  
Study Area 1862-80  
1881-1919

## REFERENCES

Ruth Baxendale "History of Bassett School Property and Early Transactions" (unpubl. typescript)  
State Heritage Branch Files  
1. The Southern Argus 27/8/1862 in Dunstan, Vol. I, p.60

Verbal  
Archival photographs

TYPE OF ITEM  
LAND Natural feature ☐  
Historical site ☐  
Historical Gdn. ☐  
BUILDING ☒  
STRUCTURE ☐  
PHYSICAL CONDITION ☐

PHOTOGRAPH Film No. 1205 Negative No. 1



STATUS  
Reg. of State Her. Items  
Reg. ☒ Interim L ☐  
Nominated  
National Estate  
Reg. ☒ Proposed L ☐  
National Trust  
CL ☒ RL ☐ File ☐  
Other ☐  
☐

LAND TITLE  
C.T. 606/115

RECOMMENDATION  
(A) State ☒ (B) Local ☐

PREPARED BY  
HERITAGE INVESTIGATIONS  
AND HISTORICAL CONSULTANTS  
PTY LTD 1981

celebrations and were widely respected. James Bassett died in 1875 and his successor, Thomas Noye, became head teacher of the new Willunga State School in 1877. In 1896 the schoolroom was transferred to Willunga Council and it was used as the Council chambers for many years.

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE: As a purpose built schoolroom of high structural integrity, the building well represents the educational history of a prosperous township prior to the State's assumption of responsibility in this area.

PROJECT  
HERITAGE SURVEY REGION 4

Item Ref. No. 236

L.G.A.

Willunga

Film No.  
Negative No.

Film No.-  
Negative No.

Film No.  
Negative No.



HISTORICAL RESEARCH: BASSETT SCHOOL GROUP, ST. LUKE'S STREET, WILLUNGA

The Willunga area was surveyed in 1839 by John McLaren and in 1840 the private township of Willunga was laid out, being one of the first towns established in the State outside of Adelaide. Already, by late 1840, the town had become known for the quality of the slate quarried there, and this became one of Willunga's major industries last century.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Willunga was situated in a productive agricultural district and 'wheat and other produce from Bull's Creek, Finnis, Meadows and McLaren Vale were carted in bullock wagons through the town to Port Willunga, from which roadstead it was dispatched to Adelaide, or sometimes overseas'.

With the closer settlement of the Aldinga plains in the late 1940's, Willunga's population grew and the need for a school became apparent. James Bailey Bassett started a school in 1847 in his new residence, Buckland House. The following year he applied to the Lieutenant Governor for financial aid, and 'accompanying his letter was a petition from parents who wanted their children to be taught by Mr. Bassett in 'a commodious schoolroom' which had been recently built ... In 1850, a further petition was sent for forty-one students to be given tuition by Mr. Bassett ....' Bassett's school would appear to have been the first school opened in Willunga, followed by Henry Marshall Cox's school, which opened in 1849. This operated for only a few years. Other schools followed, one at Logan's Flat and two established in Willunga in the year 1862. However, these disappear from the records and did not operate for very long. In 1853 James Bassett's school had 33 girls and 36 boys, presumably all taught at the schoolroom that was part of Buckland House. The story now becomes somewhat unclear. 'In 1851 James Bassett's first wife had died and two years later he was married again, to Mary Murrell, who as Mrs. Bassett opened a school in Buckland House during the latter part of 1853, apparently taking the girls from her husband's school next door. Both schools continued to flourish and in 1860 there were 54 boys and 37 girls at the two schools'.<sup>2</sup>

Bassett built a schoolroom near Buckland House for his Boys' School around 1862, although the National Trust file gives the date as 1854, as indicated by the following newspaper reference:

"amongst the many buildings erected lately in the township the new schoolroom of Mr. Bassett occupies a very prominent position ... It is strictly a private venture of the worthy owner being built wholly at his expense. It is reported that there will be an inauguration of the school in a few days..".<sup>3</sup>

The Bassetts imparted a sense of occasion to education events, including examinations. These were held at the end of each year, heralded by a fife band and concluded by sports and games, with refreshments provided for visitors and students alike. Not surprisingly, the schools' attendance rose so that by 1874 there were 87 boys and 63 girls on the roll. In December, 1875, the much amended Education Act came into force, which effectively brought all licensed schools under the control of the newly formed Council of Education, and made education compulsory for all children aged 7-13 years of age.

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1. S.A. Register, August 26, 1840
  2. Anne Matthews, Willunga Public School - a centenary history 1877-1977.
  3. Martin Dunstan, Willunga Town and District 1837-1900, p.60

Earlier in the year of 1875, James Bassett died so he did not witness the transition to the State system, signified by the building of the Willunga State School in 1876. However, Thomas Noye who had succeeded him at his school, became the head teacher of the new school in 1877. Charlotte Smith, who was head teacher of the Girls School, was appointed head teacher of McLaren Vale at the same time. Bassett's Boys School became the council chambers and the former Girls' School is now a private residence.

In a local context, the two schools run by Mr. Bassett, and later in conjunction with his second wife, were significant in that they reflected the growth of the area and the expectations of the community regarding the education of the young. The activities of the schools reflected the special abilities and conceptions of the Bassetts who obviously believed that education was not incompatible with a wider involvement in committee affairs. On a State level, the Bassetts two schools represent the period prior to the State's assumption of responsibility in the area of education, when local abilities and initiative provided tuition for the children of local farmers and settlers.

Sources:

Martin Dunstan, Willunga - Town and District 1837-1900  
Lynton Publications Pty. Limited, 1977.

Mary Grose 'Discovering The Fleurieu Peninsula with the National Trust', 1972

Anne Matthews: Willunga Public School - A Centenary History 1877-1977 -  
Willunga Primary School Centenary Committee, 1977.

Annely Aeuckens  
Register Historian

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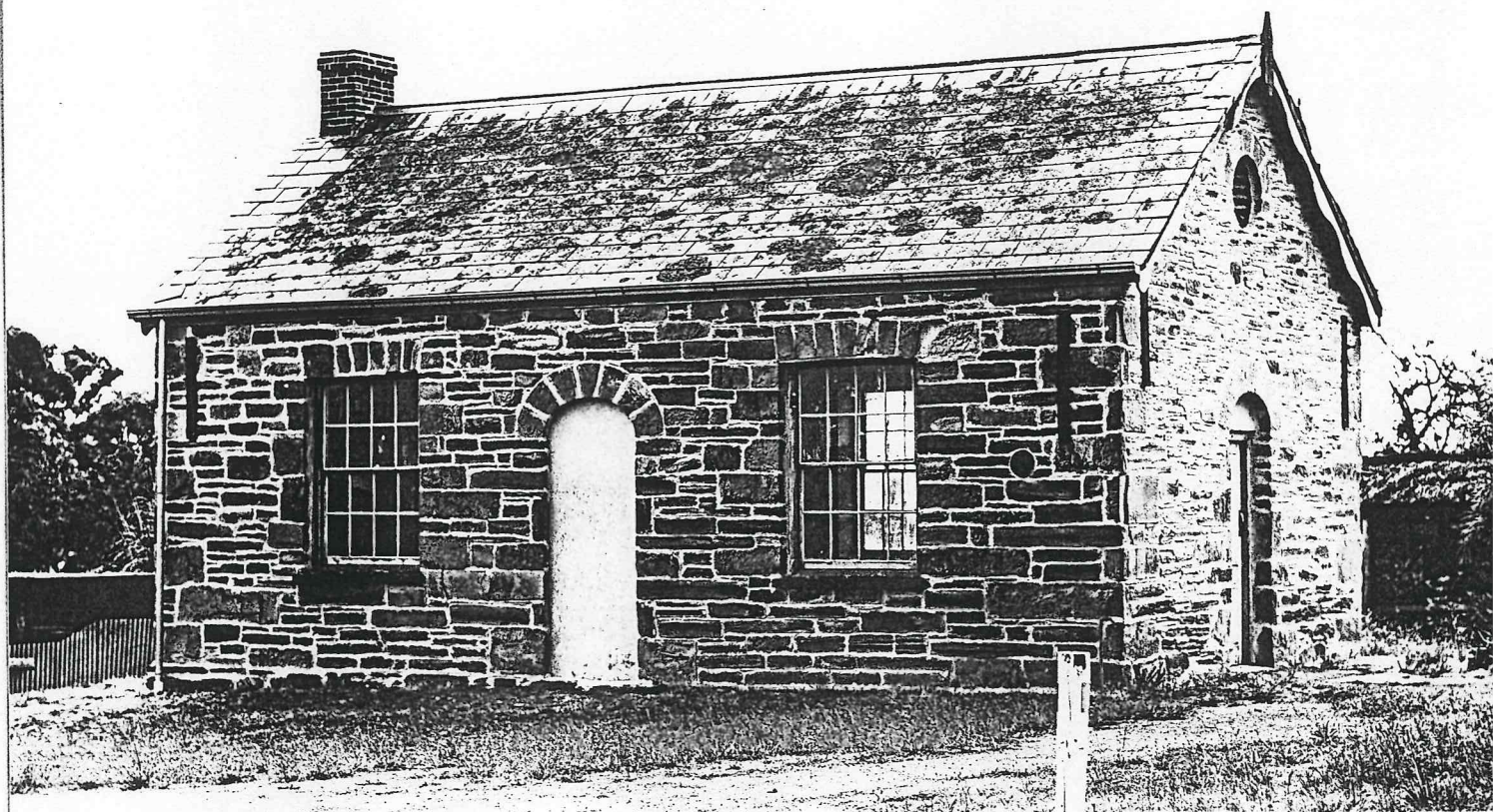
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South Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	Register of State Heritage Items ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Buildings and Structures															
	Item BASSETT'S BOYS SCHOOL - WILLUNGA (DISTRICT COUNCIL CHAMBERS) - PART OF THE BASSETT'S SCHOOL GROUP															
Age	Theme		Office													
Period	Subject		Region													
Building Type	Style		Status													
<u>Qualitative Data</u>			<u>Grading</u>													
Component	Comment	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>E</th> <th>VG</th> <th>AG</th> <th>FP</th> <th>NA</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					E	VG	AG	FP	NA					
E	VG	AG	FP	NA												
<u>History</u>																
1. Context:	Associated with the early history and development of the 1840s. James Bassett's School was one of the first two schools to operate in the town.	*														
2. Person/Group:	James Bassett, Schoolmaster.	*														
3. Event:	Built around 1862. Closed 1876-77, 1951 - became Council Chambers.	*														
<u>Architecture</u>																
4. Architect/Builder:	Not readily available.	*														
5. Design:	Single storey, simple rectangular plan, door in one end, two windows and a 'blind' door on main facade, three unequal windows at rear, gable roof with decorated bargeboards, segmental stone arches over openings on main facade, brick chimney, utilitarian with modest decoration.	*														
6. Construction:	Coursed rubble stone walls with no formal quoins at corners or openings, segmental stone arches on front, timber lintels at rear, gable slate roof, slate floor.	*														
7. Interior:	Slate floor, plastered walls, fibro ceiling, fireplace in one end.	*														
8. Representation:	Reasonably scarce in its modest sense.	*														
<u>Environment</u>																
9. Continuity:	Supports the immediate character in scale, several unfortunate modern houses adjacent, compliments the Girls School Building.	*														
10. Local Character:	Supports the character of the Town of Willunga in scale, age and materials.	*														

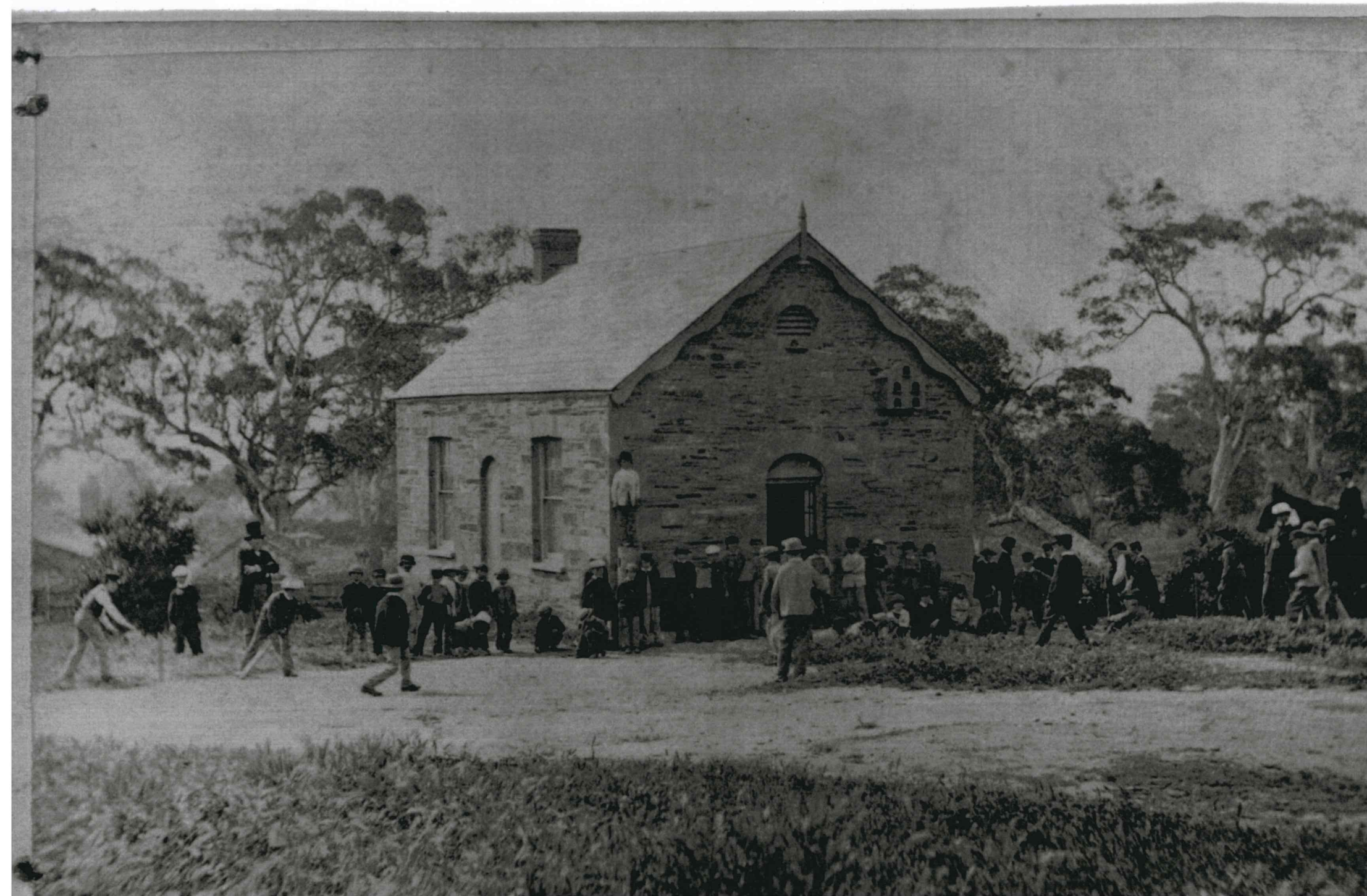








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FILM NO.  
415

BASSETT'S BOYS SCHOOL -  
WILLUNGA

JAN 82

Gals

