

Name: She Oak & Leading Light
Status: Permanently Registered
Tier: State
State

THR ID Number: 1478
Municipality: George Town Council

<u>Location Addresses</u>	<u>Title References</u>	<u>Property Id</u>
165-225 Low Head RD, , Low Head 7253 TAS	63253/1	3321010
351 Low Head RD, , Low Head 7253 TAS	N/A	7453424
165-225 LOW HEAD RD, , LOW HEAD 7253 TAS	168079/1	3321010



She Oak leading light

DPIPWE, 2017



She Oak side view

DPIPWE, 2017



She Oak

DPIPWE, 2017



Internal staircase,
leading light

DPIPWE, 2017

Setting: She Oak conjoined cottages are situated in the northern Tasmanian seaside village of Low Head and stand in the centre of a small block of land surrounded by lawns, with a few mature trees planted on the boundaries of the property. The entrance to the block is via a lane running west off Low Head Road. The building is partly screened from Low Head Road by a stand of trees. The building is not aligned with Low Head Road, having been built before the road existed. Instead, the front of the building faces south-west and stands about 80 metres from the River Tamar estuary, from which it is separated by a narrow coastal reserve. The building is only a few metres above sea level.

The She Oak Point leading light stands about two metres above high water mark, and a few metres to the north of She Oak Point. The base of the building is surrounded by low vegetation. Dense vegetation at least two-metres high also stands between the leading light tower and She Oak cottages, thus obliterating the visual connection between the two buildings that once underscored their relationship.

Description: She Oak consists of two symmetrical single-storey conjoined cottages of rubble-stone construction, built in the Victorian-Georgian style. There are brick quoins at the four corners and four distinctive symmetrically-placed corbelled chimneys, each with two pots. The roof is hipped and clad in red corrugated steel roof. All windows are double-hung and twelve-paned. A small straight veranda shelters the middle part of the façade. The concrete steps and deck beneath the veranda have been modified to accommodate wheelchair access. At the rear of the cottages are two conjoined bathrooms connected to the main house by a corridor; these are also roofed in red Colourbond. These bathrooms were added in 1936, fifty-four years after the cottages were built.

She Oak Point leading light tower is constructed of bluestone rubble built in with cement and cemented on the inside; it tapers slightly towards the top and is painted white. The height of the tower is 9.75 metres, and its top stands 11.6 metres above sea level at high tide. On top of the tower is a veranda enclosed by a guard rail made from three strands of steel cable supported by cast iron bollards. The tower is entered at its base by a double-opening wooden door painted red. A circular iron stairway leads to the top. Light is provided by two plain rectangular windows, both set above the door. The windows and door have brick surrounds, and the windows concrete sills. Atop the tower is an octagonal glass-paned light surmounted by a copper cupula and weathervane. It still contains the original dioptric lighting apparatus and lens, manufactured by Chance Bros of Birmingham, UK, in 1882 (*Mercury*, 2 December 1882 p.2).

History:

The cottages, She Oak and Belfont, were built concurrently in 1882 at the same time as the two leading light towers at She Oak Point were constructed. The towers were erected as aids to navigation in the River Tamar, and the cottages housed the crews whose job it was to maintain the lights.

The dangers of the River Tamar have been evident to mariners from 1798, when Bass and Flinders aboard the sloop *Norfolk* ran aground about three miles into the river, when trying to round Garden Island on the wrong (western) side. Fortunately, a rising tide freed their vessel. In 1804 William Paterson's ship, the *Buffalo*, commanded by Captain Kent, ran aground on entering the estuary. Paterson, who had been instructed to colonise the northern half of Van Diemen's Land for the British Crown, responded by having a flagstaff erected on Low Head as a guide to the other vessels in his small fleet. Shortly afterwards, Captain Kent laid down two beacons to mark the safe channel into the river. Further navigational aids were soon introduced: a pilot service in 1805 and a lighthouse in 1833 (Watts, Chapter 1).

Other beacons and buoys were installed, including two beacons erected at Lagoon Bay (just north of She Oak Point) by Captain John Lort Stokes of HMS *Beagle* in December 1842 (Watts, Chapter 2). These were replaced by two unlit stone towers at the southern end of Lagoon Bay in 1849 (Watt, Chapter 3). Their principal purpose was to guide vessels past the treacherous Hebe Reef close to the mouth of the Tamar. Being unilluminated, these beacons could not be used for navigation at night. Since at least 1854 numerous calls were made to have lights placed on them (*Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 July 1854 p.2). The situation became acute later in the nineteenth century, when the voyage between Launceston and Melbourne was the main means of entering and leaving Tasmania. If a passenger ship arrived at Tamar Heads after dark because of weather conditions, its captain had no choice but to remain outside Hebe Reef overnight, sometimes in stormy conditions, simply because it was unsafe to proceed in the absence of reliable navigational aids. This was an ordeal for crew and passengers alike (pers. com, Peter Cox, 26 May 2017).

Finally, in 1879, Rear Admiral Barnard, Master Warden of the Hobart Marine Board, was appointed to report upon the necessity of erecting leading light towers to replace the existing unlit stone towers at Lagoon Beach, as well as the probable costs of the work and maintenance of the towers. The recommendations contained in his report, presented in 1880, were accepted. The Consolidated Marine Board acquired land at She Oak Point, and the architect Harry Conway was commissioned to prepare plans for the towers themselves and for cottages to house the light keepers (*Tasmanian*, 25 November 1882 p.1; *Mercury*, 2 December 1882 p.2).

Harry Conway had migrated from Leicestershire to Launceston in c1865; once there he set up a practice. By 1870 he was being described in the press as 'that practical and well known architect' (*Launceston Examiner*, 14 June 1870 p.2). He designed a large number of private houses, including the Church of England parsonage at Westbury in 1867 and a 'noble mansion' for John Scott MHA in 1870 (*Cornwall Chronicle*, 7 November 1866 p.9 and 5 August 1870 p.3), churches in Evandale and Perth in 1871 and 1878 respectively (*Launceston Examiner*, 2 December 1871 p.5 and 18 January 1878 p.2), the Deloraine Town Hall in 1875 and the Westbury police station, court house and watch house complex in 1879 (*Cornwall Chronicle*, 8 December 1875 p.3 and 15 August 1879 p.3). In 1886 he successfully contested the seat of George Town in the House of Assembly, and represented the district for eight years. On retiring from Parliament, he was appointed Inspector of Public Works and Buildings in the north of Tasmania. Described as 'one of the best-known residents of Northern Tasmania', he died in 1905 aged seventy-seven (*Examiner*, 3 April 1905 p.5).

On 1 March 1881 the sites for the two leading lights were fixed for the Consolidated Marine Board by Commander Stanley RN. He chose positions a little to the south of the two existing stone towers. Harry Conway inspected the area in March 1882 and slightly revised the proposed site for the two keepers' cottages to ensure that they were built on hard ground. The Launceston firm, J & T Gunn Pty Ltd, was engaged to construct both the towers and the cottages (*Launceston Examiner*, 23 December 1882 p.3 and 1 March 1882 p.3).

J & T Gunn Pty Ltd was founded in Launceston in 1871. Its founders, the brothers John and Thomas Gunn, were the children of poor Scottish migrants. John was born in Adelaide in 1840, just before the family moved to Launceston, where Thomas was born in 1844. As young men, John and Thomas were both apprenticed, John to a carpenter and Thomas to a bricklayer. During the 1860s, both prospected in the New Zealand gold rush, then entered the building trade. They returned to Tasmania in 1870 and formed J & T Gunn the following year, each brother contributing the huge sum of £80,000 as seed funding, suggesting that their New Zealand experiences had borne considerable fruit. The company's first building project (in 1871) was the building of St Andrew's Church, Evandale, designed by Harry Conway. This was rapidly followed by a number of very large construction projects, which included warehouses, factories, government offices, shops and large homes. The company soon became by far the largest and most successful building firm in Tasmania (<http://www.stradbrokeislandgalleon.com/gunns.html>).

The lights for the towers were made by Chance Bros of Birmingham, England. Light was to be provided by burning colza oil (a French vegetable oil) followed shortly by paraffin, and was guaranteed to be clearly visible for a distance of about nine miles. The She Oak Point light was designed to illuminate an arc of 140 degrees and the Middle Channel light at Belfont (367 metres to the south-east) an arc of 155 degrees. Between them the lights cost £842, while the cost of construction of the two towers and cottages, Belfont and She Oak, was £2,050. By October 1882 the leading light towers and both cottages had been completed (*Mercury*, 2 December 1882 p.2; 23 December 1882 p.3; Watts, Chapter 7).

At a meeting of the Launceston Marine Board on 25 November 1882, the master warden stated that the

leading towers were to be lit for the first time on Friday 1st December, and suggested the desirability of arranging some sort of demonstration on the occasion. It was decided that the tug should steam to the Heads on the morning of the 1st taking all the members of the Consolidated Marine Board, who would remain all night and witness the opening of the lights, returning the next day. The master warden was authorised to issue invitations to a few of the leading men of the town, and to make all necessary arrangements for the trip (*Tasmanian* 25 November 1882 p.1).

Shortly after 8am on 1 December 1882, the tug *Tamar* left Queen's Wharf, Launceston, bound for She Oak Point, arriving at Low Head Pilot Station at noon. Aboard were the members of the Consolidated Marine Board and about forty guests. The Premier of Tasmania being occupied with an Executive meeting, the government was represented by T D Chapman MHA. From the pilot station, the party travelled the short distance to She Oak Point, where Harry Conway showed the visitors over the leading light towers. Speeches were made, a 'sumptuous luncheon' was enjoyed, toasts were raised and a brass band 'enlivened the proceedings'. Shortly before 5pm, some of the dignitaries began returning to Launceston in the steamer *Indignant*, while the members of the Consolidated Board stayed overnight. Once it became dark, this group were taken outside the Heads in the *Tamar* to observe the effect of turning on the lights (*Mercury*, 2 December 1882 p.2). Shortly after the new leading lights were functional, the two unlit towers at Lagoon Beach were painted black. They were demolished in the 1920s (Watts, Chapter 7; interpretive sign, She Oak Point).

Two light keepers and their families were installed in each of the two conjoined cottages at She Oak and two at Belfont. Both pairs of keepers were employed to ensure that the light towers and lights were maintained in good condition and were continuously operational. An inspection of the lights carried out in August 1887 found the towers, lantern, apparatus and burners to be clean, and the spare burners and glass chimneys ready for use in case of emergency. The cottages were all clean and in good order (*Mercury*, 20 August 1887 p.1).

In 1909 paraffin as a fuel for the lights gave way to acetylene. This system was replaced in 1949-50, when the lights were electrified and automated. This change coincided with the retirement of the last keeper, Mr Fred White, who delayed his retirement until automation took place. He had worked as a light keeper for twenty-seven years (Watts, Chapters 11 & 14).

A major change occurred to She Oak cottages during Fred White's occupancy. In 1936 conjoined bathrooms were added at the rear of the building, entered by an enclosed corridor leading to the cottages themselves (Watts, Chapter 13).

According to a plaque attached to She Oak, the cottages were 'restored and upgraded by Ainsley House Association' in 1989. Ainsley House is a large residential aged care facility, situated on the eastern side of Low Head Road. In 1994 Ainsley House Association acquired She Oak and the cadastral parcel on which it stands (CT 63253/1). In 2006 Ainslie House Association was merged with Southern Cross Care (Tas). In 2018 the two conjoined cottages are maintained and operated as two independent living units in accordance with the *Tasmanian Retirement Villages Act*. The leading light itself, like the Middle Harbour leading light standing next to Belfont, continues to be owned by the Crown, the Port of Launceston Authority now having been incorporated into the state-wide body TasPorts.

In December 2005 the lights at both She Oak and Belfont were changed over to vertical bar red LED lights with fittings clamped by U-bolts to the outside handrails (Watts, Chapter 16; email, Craig Titmus, pers. com., 16 May 2016).

REFERENCES:

Allom Lovell & Assocs, 1998, 'Low Head Conservation and Management Plan vol. 2', unpublished report prepared for Ratio Consultants on behalf of George Town Tourism and Heritage Ltd and George Town Council.

Watts, J, 'The Tamar Leads', in press, 2017 (no page numbers pre-publication).

Watts, J, 'The Tamar Leads', in press, 2017 (no page numbers pre-publication).

<http://www.stradbrokeislandgalleon.com/gunns.html>, accessed 31 July 2017.

<http://www.seasidelights.com.au/au/tas/TamarLeadingLights.asp?fState=Tas>, accessed 31 July 2017.

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

The She Oak Point leading light is important in the course of Tasmania's history as a key component in the system of aids that have contributed to the safe passage of vessels navigating the River Tamar since the early nineteenth century. It enjoys a special relationship with the nearby leading light at Belfont (THR 1479), the Low Head Light Station (THR 1480), the Pilot Station Precinct at Low Head (THR 1485) and with other earlier and subsequent systems of beacons, lead light complexes and semaphore systems. The original lighting system made by Chance Bros of Birmingham, UK, is still in place and has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of former technologies used in navigational lighting. The tower demonstrates the principal characteristics of a nineteenth century navigational light tower, and the conjoined keepers' cottages built nearby provide a reasonable and fairly intact example of a single-storey coursed-rubble Victorian domestic building. They are also significant by virtue of their long-term relationship with the tower itself. The tower is a well-known local landmark, valued by the community, visitors and particularly by boat- and ship-users. It also has a special relationship with the Launceston Marine Board, the Port of Launceston Authority and TasPorts, which have managed it consecutively for more than 135 years. The light tower and the adjacent conjoined cottages, built to house the light keepers, have a special association with their designer, Harry Conway, a prominent Launceston architect around the turn of the nineteenth century; and with the company that built them, J and T Gunn Pty Ltd, Tasmania's largest and longest-lived building company.

Significance:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

The leading light at She Oak Point is important in the course of the history of northern Tasmania. The development of Launceston and the region generally for many years depended almost exclusively upon shipping along the Tamar River; and since other means of transport have come into play, the river has remained a vital means of communication for the city and district. The two leading lights at She Oak Point at the head of the Tamar River, installed in 1882 and still in operation, have contributed to the safe passage of vessels to and from Launceston throughout their existence. The leading light at She Oak Point, and the light keepers' cottages at She Oak also enjoy a special relationship with the nearby leading light at Belfont (THR 1479), the Low Head Light Station (THR 1480), the Pilot Station Precinct at Low Head (THR 1485) and with other earlier and subsequent systems of beacons, lead light complexes and semaphore systems, which together demonstrate important aspects of shipping and navigation in Tasmania during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

The leading light at She Oak was installed in 1882. The light was manufactured by Chance Bros, Birmingham, UK, and is still in position although not currently used. The original light was created by burning colza whale oil, followed by acetylene, which in turn was replaced by electricity in 1949/1950, and then by LED lights in 2005. The leading light has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of former technologies used in navigational lighting.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

The leading light tower at She Oak demonstrates the principal characteristics of a nineteenth century navigational light tower. It does so by virtue of its stone construction and its form as a slightly tapering unadorned cylinder. Atop the tower is the original dioptric lighting apparatus and lens, manufactured by Chance Bros of Birmingham, UK, in 1882.

The conjoined cottages at She Oak provide a reasonable and fairly intact example of a single-storey coursed rubble Victorian domestic building. This is demonstrated by the building's construction from coursed rubble stone, its symmetrical form, hipped roof and double-hung sash windows. The cottages are also an example of housing provided for light house employees, and not just a standard domestic building in an urban setting.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

No Data Recorded

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

The She Oak Point leading light has a special significance for the maritime community, being a distinctive land- and sea-mark that has ensured safe passage to ship- and boat-users for over 135 years. The leading light has also been sign-posted by George Town Council and marks the start of the 'Low Head Experience', a walking route promoted to visitors and enjoyed by locals.

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

The She Oak leading light has a special association with the Launceston Marine Board, formed in 1857, and its successors, the Port of Launceston Authority and TasPorts, both of which bodies have controlled shipping along the Tamar since their inceptions; the She Oak leading light has operated under their management throughout its existence, as has the nearby Middle Channel leading light at Belfont (THR 1479).

The light tower and the adjacent conjoined cottages, built to house the light keepers, have a special association with their designer, Harry Conway, a prominent Launceston architect around the turn of the nineteenth century; and with the company that built them, J and T Gunn Pty Ltd, Tasmania's largest and longest-lived building company.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

No Data Recorded

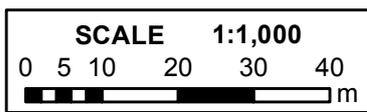
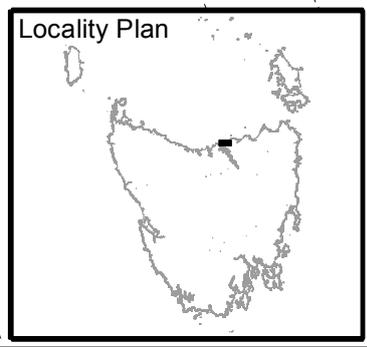
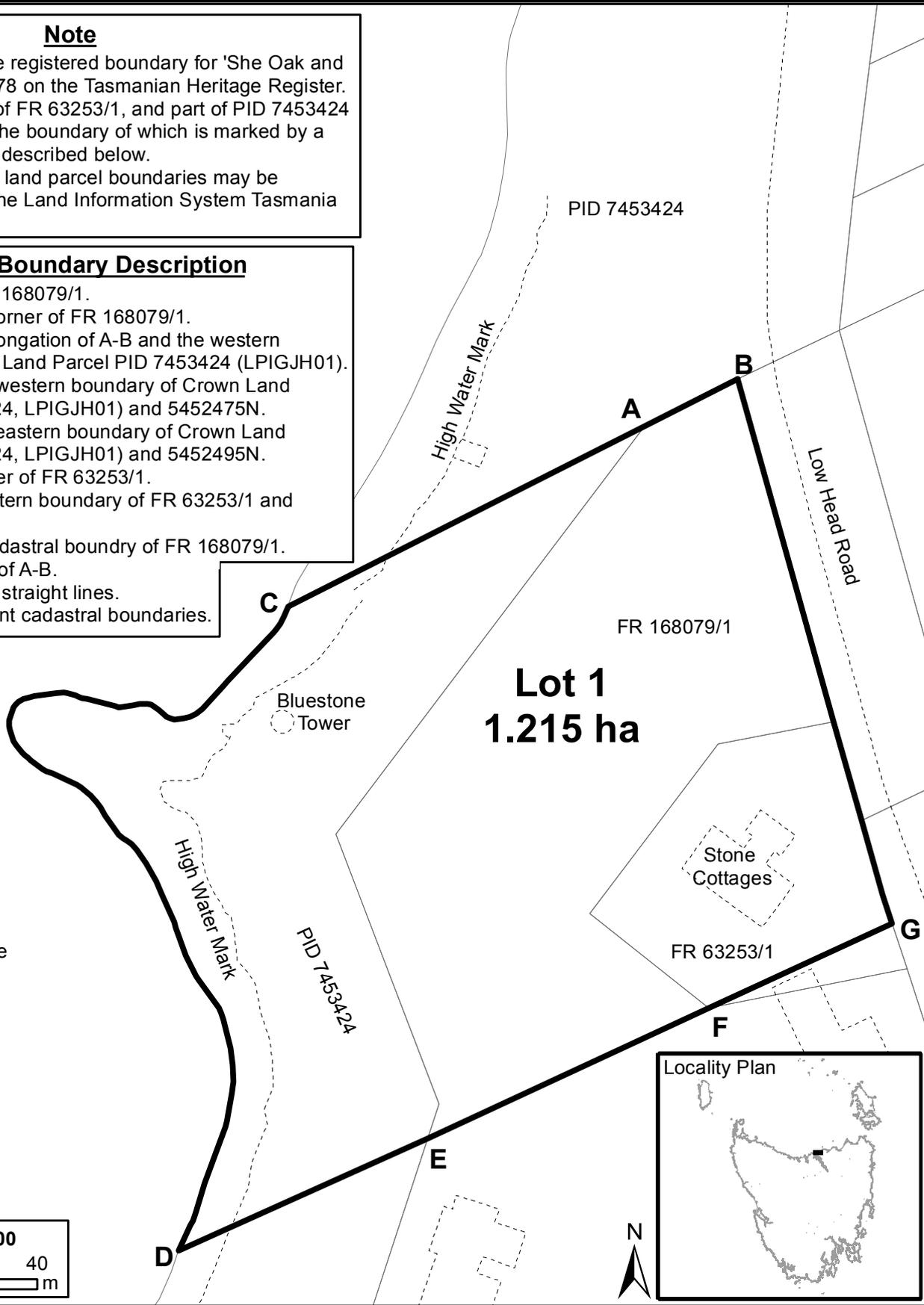
PLEASE NOTE This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Note

1. Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for 'She Oak and Leading Light', #1478 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the whole of FR 63253/1, and part of PID 7453424 and FR 168079/1, the boundary of which is marked by a thick black line and described below.
3. Details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (the LIST).

Point & Boundary Description

- A. Corner node of FR 168079/1.
 - B. Northern eastern corner of FR 168079/1.
 - C. Intersection of prolongation of A-B and the western boundary of Crown Land Parcel PID 7453424 (LPIGJH01).
 - D. Intersection of the western boundary of Crown Land Parcel (PID 7453424, LPIGJH01) and 5452475N.
 - E. Intersection of the eastern boundary of Crown Land Parcel (PID 7453424, LPIGJH01) and 5452495N.
 - F. South eastern corner of FR 63253/1.
 - G. Intersection of western boundary of FR 63253/1 and 5452533N.
- A-B represents the cadastral boundary of FR 168079/1.
 A-C is a prolongation of A-B.
 D-E, E-F and F-G are straight lines.
 All other lines represent cadastral boundaries.



TASMAP: LOW HEAD - 4845	GRID: MGA94 / ZONE 55	DATUM: AHD	CONTOUR INTERVAL: N/A
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No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE
1	Production	THC	1478	JS	DRAFT	DRAFT



She Oak and Leading Light
 165-225 and 351 Low Head Road
 PREPARED BY
 HERITAGE TASMANIA

CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER
 p.p. Surveyor General: _____
 Date Registered: _____

CPR DRAFT

