



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 8.12 Living in and around Australian homes
- 2.4.2 Migrating to seek opportunity

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 107 Settlements
- 603 Local heroes and battlers
- 605 Famous and infamous people
- 403 Government and politics

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Samson House is a fine well proportioned and aesthetically pleasing building with a distinctive belvedere situated on a large block, set amongst mature trees, well kept lawns and garden beds. (Criterion 1.1)

Samson House is an integral part of both the Ellen and Ord Street streetscapes. (Criterion 1.4)

The pine trees on either side of the front entry to *Samson House* have landscape value. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Samson House provides an important record of middle class, suburban domestic life in the late colonial period through the twentieth century. The house provides a record of almost 100 years of continuous occupation by two generations of the one family. (Criterion 2.1)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.
For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

Samson House was built for Michael Samson, an active member of local politics and Mayor of Fremantle from 1905 to 1907. The Samson family were prominent merchants in Fremantle for many years. (Criterion 2.3)

For many years, *Samson House* was the home of Sir Frederick Samson, a prominent local businessman and politician. Sir Frederick was a Fremantle City councillor for 36 years, spending 21 of them as Mayor. (Criterion 2.3)

After the death of her husband (c.1953), Sir Frederick Samson's sister Rita Laurie returned to *Samson House*, and subsequently gained much respect in her role as Lady Mayoress. She was awarded an OBE in 1967 for her community work. (Criterion 2.3)

Samson House was designed in three stages by Joseph John Talbot Hobbs. The first stage was one of Hobbs' first commissions in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.4)

Samson House is representative of Joseph John Talbot Hobbs' early work in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Samson House is likely to contain archaeological deposits that can contribute to our understanding of middle class life in the colony during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Samson House is valued by the community for its associations with a prominent local family, and in particular for its associations with Sir Frederick Samson and his sister, Rita. (Criterion 4.1)

The local community values *Samson House* as a museum dedicated to a prominent local family. It contributes to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Samson House is a rare and fine example of Joseph John Talbot Hobbs' very early architectural work in the state. (Criterion 5.2)

Samson House is a rare and early example of a residence built for the elite colonial merchant class. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Samson House, including the buildings and grounds, is important for its capacity to demonstrate aspects of suburban development and lifestyles in the late nineteenth and through the twentieth century. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Generally the place is in a fair to good condition. Some evidence of rising damp exists, the ceilings show evidence of flaking and past water ingress and the verandah roofs to the front of the building are deteriorating severely. The ceiling

to the theatrette is collapsing and requires immediate attention. The coach house is in a good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The place has a high degree of integrity. The original intent and subsequent early extension are clearly intact. The use is compatible with the significance of the place and this significance could be sustained with some conservation works and regular maintenance.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The place has a high level of authenticity with the buildings, furniture and gardens being close to their original state.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Jacqui Sherriff, Historian, and Annabel Wills, Architect, in 2008, with amendments and/or additions by Office of Heritage staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Samson House was built for Michael Samson in 1889. It was designed by newly emigrated architect, Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, who also designed additions in 1899.

Michael was the eldest son of Lionel Samson (1799-1878), who had arrived in Western Australia on the *Calista* in August 1829 with his brother, William. Lionel and William immediately went into partnership as L & W Samson, trading the merchandise they had brought out with them from England. In 1830, Lionel Samson was awarded one of the first spirit licences in Western Australia. By 1833, the Samson brothers had two stores. The partnership was dissolved in 1846 when William and his family moved to South Australia.¹

Lionel Samson left the young colony on several occasions, including a visit to England in 1834 where he married Frances (Fanny) Levi (1814-1888). Lionel and Fanny had six children between 1844 and 1855.² Michael, the eldest, was born in 1844. He went to school in South Australia and when he returned to Perth aged about fifteen, he joined his father's business for about two years before taking up a position in the Convict Establishment.³ In the 1860s, his father appointed him manager of his Fortune Copper Mining Company in Northampton, and in 1863, Michael accompanied Walter Padbury on an expedition to the North West. It was during this trip that Point Samson near Cossack and Mounts Samson, Lionel, Fanny and Michael were named. When Michael returned to Fremantle in 1863, he rejoined his father's business, which became known as Lionel Samson & Son.⁴

According to several sources, Michael Samson was 'banished' to China in 1875 where he worked as an accountant for a coal mining company. While the details of his disgrace are not known while he was estranged from his family he was removed from his father's firm and was virtually written out of his father's will. However, he returned to Fremantle in 1877 and soon re-entered society. He was a founding member of the Fremantle Yacht Club, which was formed in 1877, and was also involved in a number of other sporting and social groups.⁵

Meanwhile, his younger brother William was made a partner of their father's firm about this time. After Lionel's death in 1878, Fanny took a more active role in the

¹ Rica Erickson (compiler), *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, pre 1829-1888, Volume IV, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1988, p. 2725.

² Erickson, *Bicentennial Dictionary*, p. 2725.

³ Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House: Cottage and Stables, Ellen Street, Fremantle', Conservation Plan for the Western Australian Museum, Building Management Authority, 1995, p. 33; Patricia M Brown, *The Merchant Princes of Fremantle: The Rise and Decline of a Colonial Elite 1870-1900*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1996, p. 76.

⁴ Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House: Cottage and Stables', p. 33.

⁵ Patricia Brown, 'Samson, Sir William Frederick (1892-1974)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography – Online Edition*, www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160200b.htm, accessed 21 April 2008.

business. William was Mayor of Fremantle in 1892-3 and after his death in 1900, Katherine (William's wife) became the principal of Lionel Samson & Son. Later their three children became partners in the firm. Although the business was sold from the control of the Samson family in 1993 (five generations), Lionel Samson & Son continues to trade in 2008.⁶

On his return to Fremantle, Michael Samson took up a position with the customs department. Records indicate that he lived in a residence attached to the Lionel Samson & Son warehouse in Cliff Street.⁷

In 1887, Michael Samson purchased Lot 926 in Ellen Street, Fremantle. In December of that year, he commissioned Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, a newly arrived architect from England, to prepare plans, specifications and tracings for a residence. John Hurst built the house at a cost of £1,050, complete with fittings.⁸ A brick, rendered and wrought iron fence was built along the Ellen Street frontage soon after the house was completed in 1888/89.⁹

Joseph John Hobbs was born on 24 August 1864 in London and after schooling at St Mary's Church School in Merton, Surrey, he worked as an architectural draftsman to a builder, John Hurst, with whom he migrated to Perth in 1887. Talbot Hobbs was only 23 when arrived in Western Australia and soon set up an architectural practice. His commission with Michael Samson would have been one of his first jobs as an architect. J.J. Talbot Hobbs became a leader in the small group of Perth architects and was the inaugural treasurer of the Western Australian Institute of Architects (1896) [he was president 1909-1911]. After winning the competition for the design of the Weld Club in 1891, Talbot Hobbs was successful in getting commissions for important buildings. In 1905, he set up the firm Hobbs, Smith and Forbes. Talbot Hobbs also had a distinguished military career during and after World War I, and was a prominent public figure in the post-war years. Above all, he devoted himself to the welfare of returned soldiers. Hobbs died at sea on 21 April 1938 on his way to the unveiling of the Australian War Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. He was buried with state and military honours after a service at St George's Cathedral.¹⁰

Samson House was located roughly in the centre of the lot. The house comprised a central hall flanked by a dining room and servery, parlour, two bedrooms, and a kitchen. It has been claimed that the limestone for the house was quarried on the site. A 20 metre deep well cut through solid limestone was located behind the house.

Michael Samson married Mary Murphy in 1888. Michael was 44 and Mary was 36. It was an unlikely match, and not only because Michael was Jewish and Mary was Catholic. Michael came from one of Fremantle's commercial and social elite families; Mary was a barmaid and servant.¹¹ In 1889, Michael and Mary moved

⁶ Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House: Cottage and Stables', p. 35.

⁷ Fremantle Rate Books.

⁸ Ledgers, v. 1, Sir Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, Papers 1886-1930, ACC 2780A, Battye Library of WA History.

⁹ Photograph showing Ellen Street frontage, c. 1889, WA Museum 8310-1-2.

¹⁰ A J Hill, 'Hobbs, Sir Joseph John Talbot (1864-1938)', Australian Dictionary of Biography – Online Edition, www.abd.online.anu.edu/biogs/A090322b.htm, accessed 21 April 2008.

¹¹ Brown, *Merchant Princes*, p. 167.

from their residence attached to the Lionel Samson & Son warehouse in Cliff Street to their new home in Ellen Street.¹²

There was a lot of movement amongst members of Fremantle's social and commercial elite at this time and into the 1890s. Most moved out of the business district centred around Cliff Street to 'superior houses on high ground'.¹³ Michael Samson was no exception. At the time, there was little development in this part of Fremantle, but that was about to change with the 1890s gold boom.

Michael and Mary had four children in their Ellen Street house: William Frederick (later Sir Frederick; b. 1892), Katherine (b. 1894), Adelaide Rita (b. 1897) and another daughter who died in infancy.¹⁴

The Samsons added to their Ellen Street holding in 1895 (Lot 928), 1896 (northern portion of Lot 927 fronting Ellen Street) and again in 1901 (southern portion of Lot 927).¹⁵

In April 1898, Michael Samson had a large carriage house built on the rear of Lot 926. It comprised a carriage house, tack room, man's room, laundry and storage room¹⁶, and Talbot Hobbs was again responsible for the design. The cost of the work was £239.¹⁷ Later in the year, Hobbs was commissioned to design additions to the main house, including a new dining room, a drawing room, bathroom and pantry and an Italianate belvedere. The work, which cost £800, was completed in April 1899.¹⁸

At this time, Michael Samson was listed in the Post Office directory as a 'landing surveyor, customs' and according to Linda Young, the additions were to:

... indicate purposeful grandiosity. Michael was embarking on a classically Samsonesque path as patriarch and civic noteworthy'.¹⁹

Meanwhile, a cottage and stable were built on Lot 927.²⁰ The cottage, separated from the Samson's home by a picket fence, was let to a succession of tenants. In 1900 a Mr Linton, a post office employee, lived in the cottage. Thomas Hawkins, a labourer, lived there in 1906/07.²¹

Following in his father's and younger brother's footsteps, Michael entered local politics in 1905 when he was elected mayor (as had William been in 1892-3). He had retired from his job as Inspector of Customs the year before, but did not get to enjoy a long retirement, as he died in 1907 while still in office as the mayor.

After Michael's death, ownership of the Ellen Street property was transferred to Mary Samson.²² Beatrice Samson (their niece) moved in with Mary and the

¹² Brown, *Merchant Princes*, p. 161.

¹³ Brown, *Merchant Princes*, p. 161.

¹⁴ Erickson, *Bicentennial Dictionary*, p. 2726.

¹⁵ Oline Richards and Philip Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for the Grounds of Samson House, Fremantle, WA', prepared for the WA Museum, 1996, p. 9.

¹⁶ Linda Young, 'Samson House Fremantle WA: Conservation Analysis and Policy', WA Museum, 1985, p. 10.

¹⁷ Ledgers, v. 3, Sir Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, Papers 1886-1930, ACC 2780A, Battye Library of WA History.

¹⁸ Ledgers, v. 3, Sir Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, Papers 1886-1930, ACC 2780A, Battye Library of WA History.

¹⁹ Young, 'Samson House', p. 7.

²⁰ Richards and Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for Grounds', p. 9.

²¹ Fremantle Rate Books, 1900 and 1906/07.

²² Fremantle Rate Book, 1907/08.

children for some years. Mary Samson died on 13 January 1921 and the house was bequeathed to William Frederick.

By now, William Frederick (Freddy or Fred as he was generally known) was almost 30 years of age. After schooling at the Christian Brothers colleges in Fremantle and Perth, he began to study engineering at the newly established University of Western Australia. In 1915, he gave up his studies with the intention of enlisting in the Australian Imperial Forces. After he was rejected on medical grounds, he went to work for the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Department. By 1918, he was working as a surveyor – a job he held until 1930.²³

Until the mid-1920s, Fred lived in the Ellen Street home with his sisters Kathleen and Rita. After they left following their respective marriages in the mid-1920s, Fred lived alone for a couple of years, before moving out to live with relatives c.1927. In 1927, Dr Birmingham was living at 61 Ellen Street.²⁴ From 1928 to 1930, Amy Marks ran a boarding house there and in 1930, Fred returned.²⁵

In 1931, Frederick set himself up as an auctioneer and real estate agent in Fremantle and on 9 January 1935 he married Daphne Marks in the family home. Daphne was the 36-year-old daughter of Mrs Marks who had run the boarding house at 61 Ellen Street a few years before. In some sources she is referred to as Fred's housekeeper.²⁶ Frederick was 42. They did not have any children.

Fred consolidated the land holdings by selling off the southern and northern portions of Lot 928 in 1927 and the southern portion of Lot 927 in 1935.²⁷

By the late 1930s, the stable had been converted to a cottage, although it was not always occupied.²⁸ At some stage after World War II, Fred enclosed part of the verandah to form his own cinema, furnished with seats from Fremantle's retired trams.²⁹

In 1936, Frederick entered local politics. He was elected Mayor (unopposed) in 1951 and remained unchallenged in the position until he retired in 1972. In the early 1950s, he oversaw the construction of the O'Connor industrial estate, the first of its kind in Australia. The estate was intended to provide work and housing for returned servicemen. From the late 1950s, he campaigned to save the convict-built Fremantle Lunatic Asylum from demolition. As a member of the Cultural Development Committee, Samson also worked to ensure that Fremantle's other historic buildings were restored for public use.³⁰

In addition to local government, Frederick Samson was involved in many cultural, sporting, commercial and charitable clubs and associations. He was a founding member of the Home Building Society (1946; chairman 1951-1974), councillor of the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (1949-1964) and member of the State Electricity Commission (1954-1974). He was knighted for his service to

23 ABD Online.

24 *Wises's Post Office Directory*, 1927.

25 *Wises's Post Office Directories*, 1928 – 1931; Fremantle Rate Book, 1930/31.

26 ADB online.

27 Richards and Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for Grounds', p. 14.

28 Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House', p. 28.

29 Young, 'Samson House Conservation Analysis and Policy', p. 8.

30 ADB online.

local government and the community in 1962 and in 1969 was appointed the first honorary freeman of the Fremantle municipality.³¹

Daphne Samson died of tuberculosis in 1953. Rita Laurie (nee Samson), who was widowed about the same time, returned from Melbourne to live with Fred in their family home and subsequently gained much respect in her role as Lady Mayoress. Mrs Laurie was awarded an OBE in 1967 for her community work.³²

In April 1969, the Fremantle City Council agreed that there should be an enquiry into the question of historic buildings and places in Fremantle. The report, which was published in 1971 (while Frederick Samson was still Mayor), included details on 'The Samson House':

The Samson family home was designed by Joseph (later Sir Joseph Talbot) Hobbs (1864-1938), architect and distinguished soldier. Hobbs came to Australia in 1887, so Samson House must have been one of the first buildings which he designed in Western Australia.

Built in 1888, by Perth contractor John Hurst for Michael Samson, father of Sir Frederick, and himself Mayor of Fremantle in 1906-07, the house was regarded at the time as being "very elaborate".

Talbot Hobbs also designed Scot's Church in South Terrace and, among other buildings, the War Memorial in Perth.

As a result of the generous decision of the present Mayor, Sir Frederick Samson, to bequeath to the City of Fremantle, this magnificent old building (which we have presumed to refer to as The Samson House) will be preserved, in association with the Museum Board of WA.

Our interest in this particular context is not primarily that The Samson House will be a fine museum for all Western Australians to enjoy in years to come, but rather that it is a splendid example for future generations of a mode of living, and a way of life, that typified an era in the City's history. Its associations with an outstanding Fremantle family are no less important for being so obvious.

We have no doubt that in years to come The Samson House will be one of Fremantle's greatest historic assets.³³

Frederick Samson died at Fremantle Hospital on 6 February 1974 and was buried in Fremantle Cemetery. He bequeathed his home to the trustees of the Western Australian Museum with the condition that his sister, Rita, have the right of lifetime occupancy. Between 1974 and 1976, Rita Laurie and Florence Allen were shown in the Fremantle Rate Books as the occupants of 61 Ellen Street.³⁴ Rita Laurie died in November 1982 and the house was vested in the trustees of the WA Museum on 25 February 1983.³⁵ The bequest included everything on the site (furniture, paperwork, films, photographs, household goods, junk and so on). By this time, the carriage house had been converted to a garage, workshop, storeroom, laundry and toilet.³⁶ The total number of places bequeathed to the State of Western Australia is unknown. However, the bequest of *Samson House* in 1974, and the subsequent vesting of the place in the Trustees of the Western

31 ADB online.

32 Richards and Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for Grounds', p. 9.

33 Fremantle City Council, 'Fremantle – Preservation and Change', March 1971, pp. 23-24.

34 Fremantle Rate Books.

35 Certificate of Title, volume 1638, folio 880, 25 February 1983.

36 Young, 'Samson House: Conservation Analysis and Policy', p. 10.

Australian Museum on the death of his sister in 1982, would have been a relatively rare event at this time.

Between 1984 and 1987, the Public Works Department/Building Management Authority spent over \$200,000 on Samson House. The works included re-roofing, re-wiring, damp proofing and some refurbishment. A contemporary garage to the south of the main house was demolished at this time.³⁷ In 1987, the Building Management Authority received a Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA Chapter) architectural design award for the conservation work to Samson House.

The Minister for Arts, the Hon. David Parker, officially opened Samson House Museum on 23 August 1987. The Museum was initially open on Thursday and Sunday afternoons between 1 and 5 pm.³⁸

In October 1995, the Western Australian Museum received a grant of \$22,500 under the 1995/96 National Estate Grants Program. The grant provided funds for conservation works to the Samson House cottage and stables. The works to the cottage included restumping, roof and verandah replacement, repairing doors and windows, asbestos cladding removal and re-cladding with weatherboards. The works to the stables included replacing corrugated iron cladding to some sections of the walls with weatherboards, joinery repair and removal of the garage. The work was completed in 1997.³⁹

The Grounds⁴⁰

It has been stated that Fred Samson planted the two Norfolk Island pines in 1900 (he would have been eight at the time).

A Metropolitan Sewerage plan dated 1909 shows that the layout of the grounds had largely been established by this time. There were two carriage entrances – one of Ord Street and the other of Ellen Street. A cart track extended from the Ord Street entrance to the boundary between lots 926 and 927. Another cart way gave access to the cottage from Ellen Street, which was separated from the main house by a picket fence. There was also a fenced yard near on the rear boundary (use unknown, but may have been fowl yard).

A dominant feature in the garden at this time (and up until the 1940s) was a light timber framed arbour or trellis planted with grapes. This extended from the eastern verandah of the main house to the driveway off Ellen Street.

By c.1920, the original front wall had been rendered. At this time, there was a shaded grassed area on the western side of the house, with a tall solid picket fence along the Ord Street boundary. The cotton palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) was then only a young plant. A painted timber lattice fence separated a large vegetable (and possibly flower) garden from the eastern side of the house. Sweet peas, possibly vegetables and some fruit trees, were planted in the area to the east of the drawing room. Clothes lines and a decorative timber bird cage were located in the service area in front of the laundry and coach house.

³⁷ Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House: Cottage and Stables', p. 29.

³⁸ Richards and Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management', p. 4.

³⁹ 'Western Australian Museum, Samson House Cottage and Stables, Fremantle, Western Australia: Conservation Works Final Report', pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ Richards and Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for Grounds'.

In the 1930s, the picket fences along the Ord and Ellen Street boundaries were replaced with low, open timber and metal mesh fences, which opened the view of the house to the street. The timber lattice fence separating the house and garden was also replaced about this time.

By the early 1940s, Fred had developed rectangular rose garden beds separated by concrete paths in the area that had previously been the vegetable garden. He also planted extensive beds of sweet peas, gladioli, dahlias and chrysanthemums.

A water garden to the east side of the drawing room was built in 1941 and was planted with shading plants. It is said that Fred built the water garden as a birthday present for Daphne. The rockery garden on the western side of the house was also built about this time.

There has been little change to the gardens since the 1940s, apart from some paving and fence treatments.

Fred Samson exhibited in local horticultural exhibitions, was a member of the Rose Society and foundation president of the Fremantle Horticultural Society. By the early 1980s, when the WA Museum acquired the property, 'the grounds had deteriorated due to lack of maintenance over a number of years'.

In 2010 plans are underway for *Samson House* to be vested in the National Trust (WA). The WA Museum has entered into a deed of retirement and will appoint the National Trust as the Trustee of the house. As the house was bequeathed to the WA Museum to be held in trust for the purposes of establishing a museum in Fremantle, the vesting will preclude the National Trust from selling *Samson House* for profit at any point in the future. The transfer is scheduled to be complete by July 2010.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Samson House comprises a single storey (with belvedere) limestone, brick and iron house, coach house, stables, cottage and gardens. The main house was constructed in 1889 and designed by Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, who also designed additions in 1899.

Samson House is situated on the corner of Ellen and Ord Streets, Fremantle. The house is located on the lower northwest slope of Monument Hill. The front facade faces to the north and there is a visual link to the Fremantle Arts Centre (former Fremantle Asylum). The secondary facade of the house faces west towards the city centre of Fremantle.

Immediately to the north is the corner of the John Curtin High School site (which is currently [2008] bush land). To the northwest corner on the opposite side of both Ellen and Ord Streets is Fremantle Park. Single storey residential buildings are located on the western side of Ord Street. To the south and rear section of the eastern boundary there are new, two and three storey residential buildings of a higher density. To the front section of the eastern boundary is a single storey house of the Federation era. State Registered *Lenaville* is located to the south of *Samson House*.

Samson House forms an integral part of this section of Fremantle which includes Monument Hill, Fremantle Prison, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle Park, John

Curtin High School and a large stock of significant residential buildings. It is an integral part of both the Ellen and Ord Street streetscapes.

Samson House (Main House)

Samson House is a single storey (with belvedere) limestone, brick and iron house constructed in 1889 and designed by Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, who also designed additions in 1899. The architectural style is Federation with elements of Queen Anne.⁴¹ Although a very early example, the place does display many of the characteristics typical of the Queen Anne style such as the ensemble of various roof forms, projecting diagonal corner and wide verandahs with timber posts and ornamental brackets. The Italianate belvedere has landmark prominence.

The house has an 'L' shaped plan form with the original 1889 portion of the building comprising a central entry with a central hall beyond, two front rooms with bay windows and several rooms flanking either side of the hall, with a bedroom and dressing room to the eastern side of the hall and the dining room (now sitting room) kitchen, pantry and larder to the western side. There is a 20 metre deep well just outside what was the rear door which is now accessed from the kitchen hall following the 1899 extensions.

The 1899 extension to the building formed the 'L' shaped plan and included a new dining room, drawing room, belvedere and bathroom and a cellar below.

In the 1950s the northeast portion of the original verandah was enclosed to form a movie theatre. This room contains seating from the old Fremantle Trams.

The walls to the main house are constructed of limestone (which was possibly quarried on the site) with red face brick quoining. The roof is hipped and clad with corrugated iron and has bracketed eaves. There are six rendered and corbelled chimneys.

There is an ogee profile corrugated iron verandah with timber floor, timber posts and wrought iron brackets, balustrade and frieze around the building. Windows are generally timber double hung sashes and the doors are generally timber French doors.

The belvedere is Italianate in style and constructed of rendered masonry. There are three arched shaped windows to both the north and south sides with a circular window below on the northern side, and two arched shaped windows to the east and west sides.

The northeast verandah has been later infilled with fibre cement sheeting and glazed louvres.

Internally the building has wide timber floorboards on timber joists, which in some cases are laid directly onto naturally situated limestone. There is carpet to the central hall. The walls are plastered and painted and there are large decorative timber skirtings with a varnished finish. The central hall has decorative plaster arches and there is a high-level picture rail to some rooms. The ceilings are generally lathe and plaster with no cornices. Original, marble and timber fireplace surrounds with cast iron inserts and tiled hearths.

⁴¹

Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert, Reynolds, Peter A *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989

The kitchen contains a sink and an original Metters stove. The pantry contains timber shelving. The well is visible and has a clear trafficable glass cover over.

The 1899 hall leads to an arched opening beyond which is the cast iron spiral stair leading up to the belvedere. The belvedere has a timber floor and rendered and painted walls. There are some decorative ceiling roses to rooms of the 1899 extension and decorative stained glass fanlights to the doors. The drawing room has an elaborately decorated arched alcove with a bay window. The cellar below the 1899 extension has limestone walls, the underside of the floor above as a ceiling and a timber balustrade stairs for access.

The bathroom to the rear of the house has a floor of grey-white marble and white and aqua coloured ceramic wall tiles with a Greek style ceramic tile frieze, a cast iron claw foot bath (probably original) and a washstand.

The enclosed northeast verandah (theatrette) has a carpeted floor over the timber verandah floor, painted fibre cement walls and a plasterboard ceiling with a decorative cornice. One section has bare concrete paving slabs to the floor. The originally external wall to this room has been painted over the limestone and brick quoins.

There is a low brick wall to the southern end of the west and south verandahs dating from the 1960s.

The house contains an extensive collection of furniture and artefacts. A detailed description of these items can be found in the Museum's inventory.

Front Fence

There is a rendered limestone and iron fence to a portion of the northern boundary. There is a timber post and rail chain mesh fence to the remainder of the northern boundary (rose garden) and to the western boundary.

Coach House

The coach house is a single storey limestone and brick quoined building with a hipped corrugated iron roof. It contains four rooms which were utilised for a number of purposes including servant quarters, workshop, stable, tack room, carriage parking, laundry, and toilet. It was constructed in 1898 and is located to the rear (south) of the main house.

Stables

The stable building dates from c.1898 and is a single storey timber framed building clad with fibre cement sheeting and timber weatherboards. It has a gabled, corrugated iron roof. The building was converted for use as a residence some time before the 1930s and no longer has the appearance of a stable.

Cottage

The cottage was constructed in 1898 and is a simple single storey timber framed building clad with fibre cement sheeting and timber weatherboards with a gabled corrugated iron roof and simple front verandah. The main section of the cottage contains two rooms with a kitchen, bathroom and laundry under skillion roofs to the rear. The cottage was substantially conserved in 1995/96 with the assistance of funding from the National Estate Grants Program.

Garden

The garden is a significant element of the *Samson House* site. A conservation plan of the garden titled 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for the grounds of Samson House Fremantle' was prepared in 1996 by Oline Richards. This document comprehensively details the garden at Samson House, and extracts are included below.

The layout of the grounds of Samson House is essentially a simple arrangement of well kept lawns surrounding the main house, cottage and stables with garden beds adjoining the verandahs of the house and along the Ellen and Ord Street boundaries. The main entrance to the property is dominated by the pair of mature Norfolk Island pines which flank the entrance path and cast a deep shade across the narrow garden area in front of the house. Although they obscure the main elevation of the house and regular maintenance is required to remove tree litter from the gutters and paths, the trees are impressive specimens which provide a distinctive character to the grounds and are a local landmark.

Generally the place is in a fair to good condition. Some evidence of rising damp exists, the ceilings show evidence of flaking and past water ingress and the verandah roofs to the front of the building are deteriorating severely. The ceiling to the theatrette is collapsing and requires immediate attention. The coach house is in a good condition.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

A search of the Office of Heritage database for other houses in Fremantle constructed between 1880 and 1900 returns 88 entries, of these 19 are on the State Register, seven of which were constructed in the Federation Queen Anne style. Although it is difficult from the database to specifically identify which if these were built by the Fremantle 'elite' those notable for their associations with members of the wealthy merchant classes include:

- *P00792 Woodside* - William Moore (1897; later Woodside Maternity Hospital)

Woodside Hospital, a two storey brick building in the Federation Free Classical style, was constructed in 1896-97 as a private residence for William Dalgety Moore. Moore was born in 1835 at *Oakover* in the Swan Valley into one of the most well regarded families in the colony and later became successful in his own right. His father, Samuel, was a respected landowner and successful businessman in Fremantle.⁴²

- *P1035 Hillcrest* - Francis Pearse (1901; later Salvation Army Maternity Hospital and now aged care facility).

Hillcrest, a two storey Victorian Italianate style building was constructed in 1901 for Francis Pearse, a prominent merchant and son of businessman William Silas Pearse.⁴³

- *P2906 Warwick* – Charles Hudson (1898)

Warwick, a large villa in the Federation Queen Anne style was constructed in 1898 for Charles Hudson, a prominent Fremantle merchant. Charles Hudson, the

⁴² Office of Heritage Register Documentation for *P00792 Woodside Hospital*, p. 4.

⁴³ Office of Heritage Register Documentation for *P1035 Hillcrest*, p. 4.

son of Burra merchant William Hudson, was educated in South Australia and came to Western Australia in 1884 joining the firm of William Sandover, hardware merchants, becoming a partner in 1890.⁴⁴

- P2907 Atwell (1898)

Atwell, a large late nineteenth-century Federation Bungalow, was built to house the family of Henry Atwell, a prominent Fremantle businessman, in 1898. Atwell, born in England in 1831, was convicted of 'uttering forged papers' in 1856 and transported to Western Australia 1863. Given his ticket-of-leave shortly after arrival and a conditional pardon in 1866 he became successful in his business endeavours.⁴⁵

- P3694 Penshurst (1897)

Penshurst, a two storey Victorian Italianate house built in 1897, was the property of a number of merchants and politicians during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, including Philip Collier, the longest serving Labour Premier of Western Australia.⁴⁶

According to Patricia Brown:

In some cases, these new houses were built, as in the case of Michael Samson, at the time of marriage, but more often they were established because of a desire of the affluent for more space or more comfort, and, as far as Moore, Lilly and Manning were concerned, for the display of wealth. ... By comparison ... the home of Michael Samson, built in 1889 at the time of his marriage, was a mere cottage. It comprised about five rooms, though with a cellar and wide verandahs. There were a dining room and a parlour, two bedrooms, one with a dressing room or a child's room attached, a lean-to kitchen, a bathroom and outside, a laundry and stables. Even ten years later, when a tower and grander reception rooms were added, it could not claim such magnificence [as the mansions built by other Fremantle elites].⁴⁷

However, *Samson House* was still sumptuous compared to the majority of homes in Fremantle at that time and in 2010, remains as a representative example of the types of houses built for Fremantle merchants and professionals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century.

A number of other buildings in Western Australia designed by Talbot Hobbs, or the company of Hobbs, Smith and Forbes are still extant, 55 of which are on the State Register. Of these approximately 10 were originally used for residential purposes though within this number are precincts in Northbridge and Perth. Eight are in the metropolitan area though two of these P1924 The Cliffe, and P3848 House 69 Mount St Perth, have been removed from the State Register. The following 6 remain on the State Register of Heritage Places:

- P2043 *The Terraces*, Mount St, Perth (1890)
- P2094 *St George's House*, St Georges Terrace, Perth (1891)
- P2168 *Dilhorn*, Bulwer Street, East Perth (1897)

⁴⁴ Office of Heritage Register Documentation for *P2906 Warwick*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Office of Heritage Register Documentation for *P2907 Atwell*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Office of Heritage Register Documentation for *P3694 Penshurst*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Merchant Princes*, pp. 162-3.

- *P3235 Hill's Residence (fmr)*, Hay St, East Perth (1895)
- *P3795 William Street Precinct*, Northbridge (1880-1925; Hobbs 1906?)
- *P4342 Residence, 52 Mount Street*, West Perth (1892)

A search of the Office of Heritage database for places constructed in the Federation Queen Anne style returns 389 entries. Of these 88 are on the State Register, seven are in Fremantle, some of which have been discussed above. Additionally, the following places are noted as having been constructed in the Federation Queen Anne style and are on the State Register:

- *P0802 Aldgate*, East Fremantle (1895)
- *P0803 Knocknagow*, East Fremantle (1899)
- *P0805 Woodlawn*, East Fremantle (1898)
- *P0931 Dalkeith House*, Fremantle (1897)
- *P9241 Fothergill Street Precinct*, Fremantle (1898-1908)

The above would suggest that *Samson House* is a relatively rare and early example of a residence built for the colonial elite merchant classes. Although other examples are still extant many of these were constructed later, i.e. in the gold rush boom of the 1890s, and were not occupied by the same family for almost a century. Additionally, the place is a fine and rare example of Talbot Hobbs earliest work in the state.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

Heritage and Special Projects, 'Samson House: Cottage and Stables, Ellen Street, Fremantle', Conservation Plan for the Western Australian Museum, Building Management Authority, 1995.

Oline Richards and Philip Palmer, 'Conservation Plan and Landscape Management Plan for the Grounds of Samson House, Fremantle, WA', prepared for the WA Museum, 1996

Linda Young, 'Samson House Fremantle WA: Conservation Analysis and Policy', WA Museum, 1985.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

The total number of places bequeathed to the State of Western Australia is unknown. However, the bequest of *Samson House* and its contents, in 1974, and the subsequent vesting of the place in the Trustees of the Western Australian Museum on the death of his sister in 1982, would have been a relatively rare event at this time. Further research into the number and nature of bequests during the late twentieth-century would be required to confirm its rarity.