

OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES -ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE 11.

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

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Savoy Hotel is a fine example of the Federation Free Classical style and displays aesthetic qualities valued by the community. (Criterion 1.1)

Savoy Hotel provides an excellent example of the Federation Free Classical style of architecture applied to a major city hotel. The work has been attributed to John Talbot Hobbs of the firm Hobbs, Smith and Forbes. (Criterion 1.2)

Savoy Hotel has a landmark quality in central Perth; however, its early prominence as a place providing river and city views has been compromised as the surrounding area has been built up over the years. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Savoy Hotel is significant as an example of a major city hotel built towards the end of Western Australia's gold boom period. It is a tangible reminder of the optimism and prosperity of Western Australians early this century. (Criterion 2.1)

The place also reflects the growth of the commercial district in central Perth in the early years of the twentieth century. (Criterion 2.1)

Savoy Hotel is significant for its use as an army club during World War Two. (Criterion 2.2)

The site is significant for its association with prominent Western Australian business people including Daniel Connor, Timothy Quinlan, Fanny Breckler and Jack Sheedy and with the company Cecil Brothers. (Criterion 2.3)

The place is important as an example of the works of architects Hobbs, Smith and Forbes. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989. Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Doc'n Savoy Hotel

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The site's continual function as a hotel from the 1870s through to 1990s contributes to the community's sense of place, as does the existence of Betts and Betts (Cecil Brothers) shoe store on the ground floor since 1932. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Savoy Hotel was one of the largest hotels built in Perth in the period up to 1914. As it was constructed towards the end of the boom period, there were few buildings to rival its size for many years. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the impending hosting of the Empire and Commonwealth Games, that larger hotels were being constructed, benefiting from the new technologies of the day. *Savoy Hotel* therefore remains important as a rare example of a large and opulent hotel of the boom era in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Savoy Hotel is a representative example of the Federation Free Classical style. The room layout and planning of its upper floors is representative of the type of hotel accommodation expected by wealthy travellers in the early part of this century. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Savoy Hotel is in a generally poor condition for its age. Major changes to the ground floor structural system to provide open retail spaces have compromised the structural integrity of the building causing failure in the balconies and front facade. Poor maintenance of gutters and flashings on the roof and balconies has resulted in extensive localised water damage in many areas of the building. Maintenance to the upper floors has not generally been carried out as there has been no foreseeable use for these spaces since the closure of the hotel in the 1980s. Asbestos materials have been identified in the building but these are in discreet locations and would not pose any particular difficulties in removal.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The building presumably had public areas on the ground floor which were eventually taken over by retail spaces. This resulted in a new bar being established in the basement and public bar areas established on the first floor which had previously been the domain of hotel guests. The use of the ground floor entirely for retail space reflects the economic value of such space in a building located in the heart of the shopping district of central Perth.

The vacant upper floors are substantially intact and much of the original layout and finishes could conceivably be restored. However, direct access to the upper floors from Hay Street has been closed and the former entry area used for retail space.

The exterior of the building, although exhibiting structural problems in the balconies, could also conceivably be restored.

The Savoy Hotel has a moderate degree of integrity.

Savoy Hotel

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The Ascot Bar on the first floor and accommodation on levels two to five are the most intact. The ballroom (former dining room) still has the spatial qualities as originally intended but lacks evidence of original wall finishes. Some original finishes are extant beneath later accretions and would conceivably be able to be uncovered. The exterior of the building, whilst missing original towers to the roof, is substantially in its original state.

Savoy Hotel has a moderate degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Historians, Helen Burgess and Fiona Bush. The physical evidence has been compiled by Alice Steedman, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Savoy Hotel, a five-storey building containing ground floor retail tenancies, basement storage, former cinema and former hotel is located at 636 - 648 Hay Street, Perth. It was constructed in 1914 on a site formerly occupied by The Shamrock Hotel.

There has been a long tradition of a hotel on the *Savoy Hotel* site. In 1857, Joseph Aloysius Lucas leased The Shamrock Hotel from Michael Henry Condron, victualler, who had purchased Perth town lot F18 in 1857. As Condron was a victualler is it conceivable that a hotel operated for some time prior to Lucas' lease.¹ In 1883, Daniel Connor, a wealthy Newcastle (Toodyay) merchant, purchased the hotel from Lucas' widow.²

Timothy Quinlan, who was married to Connor's daughter, Teresa, leased The Shamrock Hotel.³ Quinlan was an orphaned Irishman of the Swan River Colony who brought little wealth to the family although he had developed keen business skills as an employee of J.H. Monger. He was a Perth City Councillor from 1889 to 1902, member of the Legislative Assembly for West Perth from 1890 to 1894, and member for Toodyay from 1897 to 1911. In the 1890s, he was a director of the Stanley Brewery and the South British Insurance Company. The family firm Connor and Quinlan became one of the largest landowners in central Perth in the 1890s. Their holdings included Perth Town Lots F18, F19 and F20.⁴ Quinlan died a wealthy man in 1927.⁵

Daniel Connor died in 1898 and The Shamrock was transferred into joint ownership of Timothy Quinlan, Michael O'Connor, Bernard Connor and Catherine Connor. Monica Hayes replaced Catherine Connor as a joint-

¹ Lucas had an option to purchase the hotel for £2,000 on the death of Condron and it appears that, on this event in 1880, Lucas approached wealthy Newcastle (Toodyay) merchant, Daniel Connor for a loan.

² Memorial no. 305, vol. 6, 18/9/1857; Memorial no. 2581, vol. 7, 15/10/1877; Memorial no. 751, vol. 8; Memorial no. 170, vol. 9.

³ Stannage (C. T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of the Western Australia's Capital City*, City of Perth, Perth, 1979, pp. 226-7) suggests that The Shamrock had been purchased by Timothy Quinlan and Teresa Connor in 1883, the year of their marriage. However, it appears that Quinlan leased the hotel from this father-in-law, as Certificate of Title Vol 66, Folio 162 notes that the property was leased to Timothy Francis Quinlan from 1892 for a period of nine years. A small outline plan of the Shamrock Hotel is included on the Title, under the heading of 'Easements and Encumbrances'.

⁴ Stannage, op. cit., p.226.

ibid., p. 226.

tenant in 1911.⁶ In 1913, the various portions of town lot F18 were amalgamated onto one title under the names of Quinlan, Connor, O'Connor and Hayes.⁷

As a result of the economic and population boom from the Goldrush the rateable value of the central city properties more than doubled in the nine years from 1895 to 1904. The lots F18 to F20 were tenanted by over 80 shopkeepers, businesses and hoteliers. Quinlan also owned lot F1 in Barrack Street.⁸ In 1905, records of architect John Talbot Hobbs indicate that he worked on plans for a Savoy Hotel, however; it was not until November 1912 that tenders for a new Shamrock Hotel to the design of Hobbs, Smith and Forbes were first advertised.⁹ The contract was let to prominent builder C. W. Arnott for £48,787.¹⁰

The building was later described as the future Gresham Hotel. It was to have six floors to the Hay Street frontage in brick and cement, to have balconies on four floors and a mansard roof with towers placed at each corner. A theatre was planned at the rear of the building to seat 1500 people in stalls, dress circle and gallery. Particular attention had been given to ventilation with sliding roofs over auditorium and gallery. There were to be fire escapes fitted on all floors and two entrances from Hay Street and side entrance to the gallery. Partitions throughout were to be of Sackett boarding and it was to have elaborate metal ceilings throughout. The existing hotel was to be demolished together with the adjoining premises. The architects promised that the design would 'add materially to the architecture of the city' and that when complete it would be the largest hotel in Western Australia.¹¹

A drawing with the only label being 'Savoy Hotel' shows two sketch sections through the building, in particular detailing the rear building containing the current Ascot Bar. These may possibly be Hobbs' original plans.

The name of The Shamrock Hotel was formally changed to *Savoy Hotel* in 1914.¹² Various licensees are noted over the following years. An advertisement in Wise's Post Office Directory of 1916 describes the Hotel as:

The Ritz of Australia. Just erected at enormous cost, contains most up-to-date equipment of any hotel in Australia, each department controlled by an expert....visitors to find all leading features of English and Continental Hotels. Excellent cuisine, modern furnishings, exclusive orchestra, English grill room, afternoon tea room, American bar, complete phone and bell system, ball room, reception room, banquet hall, indoor summer lounge, private dining room, motor garage. Perfectly ventilated. Tariff 12/6 per day, 4 guineas per week. (Note: Criterion listed as 8/-per day or 2/2/- week.)¹³

In 1923, records indicate that structural alterations were made to the licensed area although these are not described.¹⁴

A photograph taken of *Savoy Hotel* in the 1920s shows an entry located on the western side of the building. A barrel vault marks the main entrance, located

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⁶ Certificate of Title Vol 66, Folio 162.

⁷ Certificate of Title Vol 557, Folio 135.

⁸ Stannage, op. cit., p.226.

⁹ Western Australian Mining, Building and Engineering Journal, November 1912.

¹⁰ ibid., 3 May 1913, p.20.

¹¹ ibid., 7 December 1912, pp. 18-20.

¹² Liquor Licensing Records, 10 March 1914.

¹³ Wise's Post Office Directory, 1916, p207.

¹⁴ Liquor Licensing Records, 1 March 1923.

to the east of centre. A number of small shopfronts are evident but the name on the awning is not legible.¹⁵

An undated photograph shows the building viewed from an elevated position to the east (perhaps the Town Hall) and clearly shows the towers on the roof and the smaller building to the rear. *Savoy Hotel* dominates the streetscape, being the tallest building in the area north-west of Barrack Street.¹⁶

During World War Two, *Savoy Hotel* was taken over by the Army and used as an army club. Nearly 100 officers would be billeted at the club at any one time. An article written for promotional purposes in 1961 links the Hotel with the famous wartime expression 'Meet you at the Savoy'. While this expression was probably used locally, it derived from the more famous Savoy Hotel in London.¹⁷

The association between Betts and Betts shoe store and *Savoy Hotel* started in the 1930s when Hay Street was known as the 'Golden Mile' as it was said to have more stores than any other district in Australia.

Joel Breckler, a Russian immigrant, had opened a boot repair shop in Fremantle in 1892 and established the family business, Breckler Brothers¹⁸ which was continued by his wife Fanny and two sons Cecil and Alec after his death in 1912. Fanny opened the first store in Hay Street in the 1920s. In 1932 a new store, located in *Savoy Hotel*, was described as 'the biggest shoe store in Australia'.¹⁹ Cecil Brothers purchased the building and adjacent properties in September 1959 from the Connor Estate. The hotel was leased and managed by a Jack Sheedy, former East Fremantle football player and later coach of East Perth.²⁰

A major refurbishment of the hotel and shoe store in 1961 cost in excess of £35000 and £65000 respectively and saw the shoe store take over the entire ground floor with the exception of the hotel entrance. The building was extended over the laneway at the rear and a new shopfront of armour plate glass was installed. The work to Cecil Brothers enlarged the shop floor to 10,000 square feet and the store claimed that the alterations made it the largest shoe store in the world. They also claimed that the entrance to the shops was the biggest in Australia, with an unobstructed opening of 22 feet.²¹

The first floor of the hotel was also remodelled to include a timber panelled and mirrored cocktail bar and the entire basement was remodelled to form a Sportsman's Bar.²² Plans, dated 1959 to 1965, show these works as well as

²² The West Australian, 6 May 1961, p 21.

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 ¹⁵ 'Perth, Hay Street, Savoy Hotel 1920s', Battye Library Pictorial Collection BA 533/53, 52063P.

¹⁶ Heritage Council File 3264, WA Newspapers ref 1632.

¹⁷ 'Beginning of a By-word', *Daily News*, 3 November 1961, p.15; Baker, A. and Jackson, L., *Fleeting Attraction: A social history of US Servicemen in Perth during the Second World War*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1996, p. 98. Baker and Jackson state that only the 50-room Esplanade Hotel and the 54-room Adelphi Hotel were considered appropriate accommodation for commissioned officers. The American troops monopolised all other Perth hotel accommodation, including many smaller licenced and residential premises. Of these, the largest were the Savoy Hotel which had 47 rooms and the Australia Hotel, which had 27.

¹⁸ Breckler Bros. was later called Cecil Brothers and is currently trading as Betts and Betts.

¹⁹ 'Betts and Betts - 100 Years Old', *The Maccabean Magazine*, 13 November 1992, p.6.

²⁰ Shepherd, D., 'Jeckyll-Hyde Jack', *Daily News*, 3 November 1961, p 13.

²¹ *The West Australian*, 11 November 1961, p 14.

new bathrooms to the hotel. They also show a new fire isolating lift enclosure, new lift cage and a new lift motor room to be constructed above the existing.²³ A three-page feature in the *Daily News* in November 1961 discusses the refurbishment of the hotel including the selection of wallpapers, carpets and furniture.²⁴

The hotel was renamed 'Savoy Plaza Hotel' by Sheedy who said it would give the hotel a more Commonwealth flavour, presumably in reference to the Empire and Commonwealth Games to be held in Perth the following year, and that it would tie in with other nearby buildings including the Plaza Arcade and Savoy Theatrette.²⁵

The Cecil Brothers shoe store continued to thrive in the early 1970s, particularly from 1971 when Hay Street became a pedestrian mall. The number of people shopping in Perth gradually declined through the late 1970s as suburban shopping centres opened.²⁶ The retail space was eventually reduced and alterations made for other tenancies.

The Cinema and hotel closed in the late 1980s. The Lessee of the hotel sold the furniture and fittings by auction. The building was declared dangerous following a dilapidation survey by Wood and Grieve Engineers in 1997 which examined the extensive cracking to the balconies on the Hay Street facade.²⁷

Savoy Hotel, including the property to the rear extending to Murray Street, was offered for sale in 1989. The four titles were offered separately or as one package and it was noted as the largest retail property to be sold in Perth since the 1970s. The site was expected to fetch a staggering \$40 to \$47 million.²⁸

It was again offered for sale in 1996 with an expected sale price of only \$23 million.²⁹ Both times the property was offered for sale the redevelopment potential targeted retail or department store development.

Cecil Brothers remains a family company, the current managing director being the great grandson of Fanny Breckler.³⁰

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Savoy Hotel, a Federation Free Classical³¹ style building, is located on the northern side of Hay Street towards the eastern end of the Hay Street pedestrian mall that runs between William and Barrack Streets. The building covers the entire frontage of the lot extending to five-storeys in rendered brick. It has a basement which extends beyond the main portion of the structure to a right of way at the rear of the building. Two two-storey buildings are constructed over the additional basement area abutting the rear

²³ Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown and Partners, Plans dated November 1959, 5/5/60, 20/12/60, 10/1/61 and 24/10/65.

²⁴ *Daily News*, 3 November 1961, pp 13-15.

²⁵ 'The ideas behind that change', *Daily News*, Friday 3 November 1961, p 14.

²⁶ 'Betts and Betts - 100 Years Old', *The Maccabean Magazine*, 13 November 1992, p.6.

²⁷ Neil Barrett of Cecil Brothers, telephone conversation, 14 August 1998.

²⁸ Hills, J., 'Savoy Hotel in City Site up for Sale', *The West Australian*, 30 August 1989, p.63.

²⁹ Kermode, P., 'Cecil Brothers puts Savoy on Market', *The West Australian*, 8 May 1996, p.124.

³⁰ Neil Barrett of Cecil Brothers, telephone conversation, 1 September 1998.

³¹ 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, pp. 104 - 107.

of the main portion of the building. Both the two-storey portions have halfgabled corrugated iron roofs. The main building has a gabled corrugated iron roof with mansard section to Hay Street. The mansard roof and the roof on the lift shaft are clad with metal decking. Roof sheeting is in a fair to poor condition.

Abutting the rear of *Savoy Hotel* is a steel-framed brick building containing a private car park at the basement level and factory/warehouse space in the three levels above. This building was not examined as part of this assessment.

Savoy Hotel is constructed of rendered brick and has a heavily rusticated symmetrical facade. It has an awning at ground level which runs the entire length of the building and balconies on the four floors above which extend just beyond the wide central portion of the building. The top three balconies have decorative cast iron railing whilst the lower balcony has a concrete balustrade and handrail. The two end bays contain groups of three windows on each floor. The central window of the group is slightly expressed and topped with a pediment on the first and third floors. A further pediment is located above the entablature which runs across the top of the building. Five pediment topped dormer windows punctuate the mansard roof above the entablature. Steel objects, presumably light fittings, are located on each corner of the two end bays.³² The name of the building is embossed across the central portion of the facade below the entablature.

Severe cracking is evident in the balustrade and face of the lower balcony and through the centre bay of the three balconies above. It appears as though waterproofing to the balconies has also failed.

The ground floor contains three retail shops being Betts and Betts shoe store on the western side, The Tie Rack in the centre, and Rockmans women's fashion on the east. The fit-out of each space reflects the individual corporate identity of the retailer. A portion of original pressed metal ceiling is evident above The Tie Rack. A flush panel door is located between The Tie Rack and Rockmans but it is not currently used to access the upper levels of the building. Access to the stair and lift well is now via Rockmans. Light and power to the upper levels has been disconnected, as these areas are no longer used.

The basement below Rockmans extends to the right-of-way and carpark at the rear. It is accessed via a central stair and lift well. The lift is in the process of being decommissioned. The southern end of the basement is used for clothes storage. It has a metal strip ceiling and vinyl covered floor and is accessed by a further set of stairs adjacent to the main stairwell. The remainder of this basement area contains a staff room, ironing room, ablutions and main switchboard. The staff room on the western side is divided from the corridor by a wall clad in v-jointed boards.

The basement directly below Betts and Betts is accessed from the right-of-way via Murray Street and contains a small cinema which is no-longer operating. Electrical supply to this area has been disconnected and access was not able to be obtained. Apparently all projection equipment and about half of the seating is extant.

The retail space of Betts and Betts extends across the right of way to the building at the rear. The rear of the retail space has a higher floor level and

 ³² A close inspection of these objects was not possible due to the height of the facade. It was therefore not possible to determine their exact nature.
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also contains some storage space. A further basement in the building behind *Savoy Hotel* is accessed via the rear of the storage space.³³

The first floor contains a lounge bar, cocktail bar and ballroom (former dining room) on the south side and the Ascot Bar and a kitchen on the north. The main stair well leads straight into the lounge bar on the south-east side of the building. The area has a metal strip ceiling, recessed down lights and pendants, painted hard-plastered walls and timber floors. Two chimney-breasts are located on the east wall although both fireplaces have been bricked in and mantle removed. The original pressed metal ceiling remains above a portion of damaged metal strip ceiling.

A raised band platform is located in the south-east corner of the room. Adjacent to the platform a window has been removed to accommodate an air conditioning unit. The condenser and fan for this unit are contained on the balcony. French doors access the balcony from the lounge bar, an adjacent small room and the ballroom at the western end of the building. Windows are double hung sashes. Additional leaded fanlights are located above the three windows at the east and west ends of the building.

The small room between the lounge bar and ballroom also has a metal strip ceiling. It can be divided from the lounge bar by a vinyl covered concertina type door. The detail of the opening to the ballroom indicates that a set of folding timber doors have been removed. The floor adjacent to the French doors in this area has collapsed due to rot from damp ingress from the balcony.

The ballroom is a grand space which extends almost the full length of the building from north to south. The ceiling is coffered and decorated with a plaster cornice consisting of egg-and-dart pattern with dentils below. A square column in the centre of the room has long slender recessed panels and a decorative floral capital. A chimneybreast is located on the western wall however a large mantle piece has been removed. There is evidence of falling damp on the chimneybreast and adjacent ceiling. At the north end of the room, a door leads to a small vestibule. A timber-framed servery with leaded glass and small sash windows is visible from the northern side although it has been obscured from the ballroom side by a false wall.

The kitchen is located under the two-storey portion of the building to the north of the ballroom. Most equipment, benches and cool rooms have been removed. It has a vinyl covered timber floor and plasterboard ceiling with timber cover battens. Windows are timber sashes and more recent steel frame sashes. All windows have large insect screens fitted internally. This area is in a poor condition.

The Ascot bar is located to the east of the kitchen. The walls have coved corners and the upper portion has panels divided by pilasters with ionic capitals and reeded columns. This space also has an ornate pressed metal ceiling. A large U-shaped bar is situated in the centre of the room abutting the kitchen area. A fireplace at the rear of the bar has been bricked in. The floor in and around the bar is tiled and the remainder is floorboards. The cocktail bar to the south of this area has plywood paneling to the walls. A ladies powder room, located midway up the next flight of stairs, appears to date from the 1920s.

The second to fifth floors of the building are basically rectangular in plan with small light wells at the east and west ends and a small wing extending

³³John Spence, Cecil Brothers employee, verbal advice, 20 August 1998.Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Doc'nSavoy Hotel23/11/2001

northwards at the west end of the building. Rooms are arranged on the north and south sides of a central corridor and the east side of the north wing. Shared bathroom and toilet facilities are located at the north-east corner of the main building and at the north-east corner of the north wing. In addition, most rooms have a shower, constructed of 'Tilux' sheet on timberframed partition, and a basin. Shared bathroom facilities demonstrate two periods of construction. Original construction includes half-glazed timberpanelled doors and partitions, and ceramic tiled walls to dado height. Later showers and toilets have 'Tilux' clad partitions and have been labelled as containing asbestos.

Most other original joinery, including reeded dado rails, skirtings and architraves, panelled doors, fanlights and carved newel posts, is extant. Most door furniture is not original. Internal walls apart from those containing the stairwell are timber-framed and ceilings are lath and plaster. The wall area below the dado rails in corridors is finished in deeply embossed wallpaper. The corridors on the second floor have deep coved cornices and those on the fifth have a small coved cornice. Larger rooms are located at the east and west ends of the southern side of the building, reflecting the layout of the facade. These rooms all have fireplaces however most have been covered over and original mantle-pieces have not been retained. The rooms are in a generally poor condition with areas of falling damp evident in at least one location on each floor. In most cases the damp damage is extensive but localised.

The second floor is the first level of hotel accommodation. It contains the guest lounge and manager's office. The office is constructed of timber panelling and obscure glass and is located at the top of the stairs. A servery window is located directly opposite the lift. The guest lounge is located on the south side of the corridor. It has been divided in two by a timber veneer finished partition and the wall at the west end has been removed so that the room extends in to a short corridor that accesses the balcony via a pair of French doors.

The third and fourth floors are similar in layout and finish, both having access to balconies on the south side of the building. The fifth floor is an attic space and rooms have dormer windows. A steep timber staircase from the fifth floor leads up to a further lift landing and a steel stair leads up to the motor room. Steel framed hopper windows are located in the north wall and all lift equipment is extant. Access to the roof is via a steel ladder from the motor room.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

The original opening date for The Shamrock Hotel could be examined through further research.

Physical inspection of the cinema may be required to determine extent of original fabric.

The development of Perth Town Lots F17-20 in relation to the Connor estate and Cecil Brothers would be an interesting study.