



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Katanning Post Office is a fine example of Federation Free Style architecture. The symmetrical composition employs dominant classical elements but achieves a balance through the subtle exploitation of the fabric. (Criterion 1.1)

The creative and artistic excellence exhibited in the brick detailing is a significant achievement. (Criterion 1.2)

The strong three dimensional form of *Katanning Post Office* establishes a presence appropriate for a civic building and makes an aesthetic contribution to the Katanning streetscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Katanning Post Office provides physical evidence of the growth and prosperity of Katanning township and surrounding agricultural areas during the period prior to World War One. (Criterion 2.1)

Katanning Post Office is directly related to the opening of the Great Southern Railway Line, and the subsequent European occupation of the Great Southern district of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Katanning Post Office is a focal point for the Katanning district where social interaction and communication take place. (Criterion 4.1)

Built on the same site as the first Post Office building, *Katanning Post Office* contributes to the town, and surrounding agricultural community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Katanning Post Office is representative of the Federation Free Style applied to civic architecture by the Public Works Department under the direction of Principal Architect, Hillson Beasley. The building is also representative of a standard design which was adopted for post offices along the Great Southern Railway. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

The fabric is in good condition and well maintained.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Katanning Post Office has a high degree of integrity having maintained its original function since construction. The evolving role of Australia Post is reflected in the removal of the Telephone Exchange to separate and substantially larger premises and the modernisation of furnishings to accommodate an increasing commercial focus. These changes have not detracted from the integrity of the place.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Katanning Post Office is substantially intact with a high proportion of the exterior detailing remaining. There have been additions to the rear, service area of the building and an extension of the south-west lobby involving the removal of part of one window in the south-west elevation. The corresponding window in the south-east elevation has been replaced with timber boarding. Internally, the telephone exchange partitioning and the original furniture have been removed and a new ventilation system which punctuates the ceiling has been installed. Overall, *Katanning Post Office* has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Katanning Post Office is a single-storey building constructed in Federation Free Style, in 1913, to a design by Western Australian Public Works Department Principal Architect, Hillson Beasley.¹

Prior to the 1880s, the south-west of the State was sparsely populated by Europeans. Sandalwood cutters worked the forests, and a few settlers established themselves by selecting 16 - 20 acres of freehold land near permanent water, or taking up grazing leases of 1600 - 2000 acres.

A track developed between Perth and Albany, largely as a result of the sandalwood cutters carting their loads to the coast for export to China. The track became known as the Albany road. In 1841, a mail service was inaugurated along this route. In 1869, the Government took over the mail run, and a police guard accompanied the mail coach.² The mail coach made the journey each way twice a month, travelling around 30 miles a day, with seven overnight stops along the way, most of them coinciding with a police station where fresh horses were obtained for the next stage of the journey. Passengers and freight were also carried.³

With the desire to attract more settlers to the area, the Western Australian Government decided to establish a rail link between Perth and Albany. The desired route was along the Albany road, but York, linked to Perth by the Eastern Railway in 1881, lobbied to be included on the rail link with Albany. The Government conceded, and extended the Eastern Railway from York to Beverley, while Anthony Hordern's West Australian Land Company Ltd constructed the line from Beverley to Albany. This section of line, opened in 1889, was known as the Great Southern Railway, and was built in exchange for land grants along the route.⁴

The Government suspended its own land offers to allow Hordern's Company to sell its land grants to migrants, but the Company had difficulty attracting prospective settlers, and its freight charges were twice as high as charges on other lines. The Government grew impatient, and made land available with The Homestead Act, 1893, which granted settlers 160 acres and allowed them seven years to make improvements, and The Agricultural Bank Act, 1894, which provided long term loans to pay for the improvements.⁵ In 1897, the Government purchased the Great Southern Railway, and all land grants, from

¹ Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Style and Terms from 1788 to the Present* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1989, pp. 136-139.

² Pederick, M. J. *The Emu's Watering Place: A Brief History of the Wagin District Churchlands* College, Perth, for Shire of Wagin, 1979, p.7-8.

³ *Yearbook of Western Australia* 1889. p.97.

⁴ *Western Australian Government Gazette* 25 September 1884, p.491.

⁵ *Statutes of Western Australia* Perth, Gov. Printer. The Homesteads Act, 1893, No. 18 of 1893; The Agricultural Bank Act, 1894., No. 21 of 1894.

the West Australian Land Company Ltd for £1,100,000, and the Great Southern district began to flourish.⁶

The township of Katanning began as a small settlement, situated midway between Etipup and Yowangup Spring, on a recognised route through the area from York to Albany.⁷ With the opening of the Great Southern Railway, Katanning was established as a railway station with a surveyed town plan that sited the post office near the station, a normal situation for towns established along a railway line.

Postal services for the area, previously provided at Moojebup, about 5kms away, were moved to Katanning in July 1889.⁸ By 1890, the township consisted of Piesse's general store, a hotel, Climie's store, and Bell's boarding house.⁹ The first post office in Katanning was built in 1892, to a George Temple Poole design, on the corner of Clive and Richardson streets. Like many of Poole's post office designs, this building had only one room for postal services with the rest of the building as living quarters for the Postmaster.

Between 1900 and 1914, there was great demand for land along the Great Southern Railway route. Disillusioned miners joined other migrants to take up farming land. The population of Katanning grew rapidly during this period.

A telephone exchange was added to the Post Office in October 1907. In 1912, tenders were called for a new post office. *Katanning Post Office* was built by J. Park at a cost of £2,482. The new building was sited on the corner of Clive and Richardson streets, to the right of the original Post Office, which occupied the left hand side of the site, facing onto Clive Street.¹⁰ When first constructed, *Katanning Post Office* managed 72 telephone extensions and 100 private postal boxes.¹¹ The old Post Office building was used as living quarters and storage.

This pattern of first post office located near the railway station, soon too small to cope with increased population and expanding communications networks and in need of replacement within twenty years, was repeated in many Western Australian country towns along the railway lines.

Hillson Beasley, the designer of *Katanning Post Office*, was the most eclectic of the four principal architects employed by the Western Australian Public Works Department, between 1885 and 1925, when that department was responsible for the design and construction of the State's post offices. In 1926,

⁶ *Yearbook of Western Australia* 1897, p.69.

⁷ Reilly, M. E. 'The History & Development of the Broomehill-Kojonup-Katanning area' Graylands Teacher's College, Perth [n.d.] Typescript of thesis, p.31.

⁸ Documents, PMG Files, Australian Archives K1209/1 B15/404.

⁹ Reilly, M. E. op. cit., p.33.

¹⁰ Drawing No 7527, PMG Files, Australian Archives K 1201/1 WE 7527, 1953.

¹¹ Bignell, M. *A Place to Meet: A History of the Shire of Katanning* UWA Press, Nedlands, for the Shire of Katanning, 1981, p.235.

responsibility for this work passed to the Commonwealth Postmaster General's Department.¹²

In 1949, the former Post Office building underwent maintenance to correct a problem with rising damp, but the work was only temporary and, in 1961, that building was demolished. A new telephone exchange building was constructed in late 1953, and the telephone exchange was removed from *Katanning Post Office*.¹³

In the same year, repairs and renovations were made to *Katanning Post Office*, by B. & B. Renovations Co., Greenmount. As well as painting and general maintenance, the counter area was modernised.¹⁴

Minor repairs and renovations have been carried out to *Katanning Post Office* at various times over the intervening years as service needs have changed. The removal of the telephone exchange, in 1953, resulted in one less service to provide, and the downgrading of services on the Great Southern Railway in the 1970s and 1980s, created a population drift from the district which further reduced the postal services required.

The interior of the building received the current standard Australia Post fitout in 1994-95.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Katanning Post Office is a single-storey brick building constructed in the Federation Free Style located at the corner of Clive and Richardson streets.¹⁵ The post office is situated in the main commercial street of the town centre and is of a similar scale to neighbouring buildings in Clive Street, although there is a three-storey telecommunications building directly behind.

Katanning Post Office is similar in design to other post offices constructed along the Great Southern Railway at Wagin and Narrogin in the same period. The principal, external difference between the post offices is that the walls of *Katanning Post Office* are constructed solely in brick, whereas at Wagin and Narrogin, the brick sits on a stone base.¹⁶ This is most evident on the side elevations where the stone extends to window sill level. The use of inventively modelled brickwork and the proportioning of individual elements of the facades have created a substantial appearance in the orthogonal building. Contrast in the texture of the external walls is provided by the selective application of cement render. The hipped terracotta tiled roof has a finial at the front apex and is crowned with a prominent ventilator and weather vane making interesting skyline features.

¹² Pope, B., Bush, F., Bloomfield, W. & Kelsall, D. *Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia* National Trust of Australia (WA) for the National Heritage Commission, 1993, p.17.

¹³ Documents, PMG Files, Australian Archives K1209/1 B15/404.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Apperly, R. et al, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-139.

¹⁶ Original drawings for *Katanning Post Office* show the base of the building constructed in stone although a note on the Side Elevation states that the stone is to be substituted for pressed brick. In these drawings, the fireplace and chimney are shown on the wrong side of the building and the Elevation to Clyde St should read as the Elevation to Richardson Street.

The symmetrical south-east elevation to Clive Street is dominated by the central Diocletian window motif. Brick voussoirs of alternating depth form the semi-circular arch surrounding the window which is highlighted with a rendered keystone. A triangular pediment supported on timber brackets has been inserted, rather incongruously, into the central panel above the sash window. The wide brick panels flanking the feature window have a central slot window with rendered sills and a keystone of exaggerated height. Every fourth course is rusticated brickwork, creating an interesting shadow play and emphasising the quoins.¹⁷ This detail is repeated in the brick piers of the east and west side elevations and columns of the external lobbies. The hipped roof over the front section of the south elevation is supported on closely spaced timber brackets above a rendered frieze which is continuous around the building. The boxed eaves are lined with timber boards.

External lobbies are located at each side of the front elevation set back slightly from the main building line. Semi-circular brick arches on two sides of the lobbies provide public access to the post office. The voussoirs and quoins of the arches exhibit similar brick detailing to the central features already outlined. A rendered panel has been placed over the keystone of the arches breaking the line of the parapet cornice which is at a lower level to the main roof. Both external lobbies have timber boarded ceilings and replacement quarry tiled floors which are slightly higher than the brick paving of the adjacent footpath. Post boxes and private mail boxes are located in the south-west lobby which has been extended into the post office interior. A display cabinet has been inserted into the corresponding wall of the south-east lobby.

The wall of the side elevations is divided by brick piers into four bays each with a brick arch surround to the Diocletian window motif comprising a central sash window, fixed sidelights and glazing bars in the upper fanlights. The windows are absent in the two bays adjacent to the lobbies and also in the bay where the fireplace is located. A brick chimney with rendered capping is evident above the roof at this point. On the south-west elevation the fanlight remains but an opening has been created below to give access to the extended lobby. On the south-east elevation the sash window and sidelights have been replaced with timber boarding to the level of the brick plinth. Horizontal stucco bands have been applied to the brickwork between the piers at the springing point of the arch and level with the top of the keystone. These are painted red and provide some contrast to the fairfaced brick.¹⁸ The back section of the side elevations accommodates the service, storage and staff facilities and is more functional in appearance than the rest of the building. A plain brick wall constructed in English bond, extends back to the driveway completing the Richardson Street elevation. It is possible to discern where the original fabric of the lean-to has been added to as there is a change in brick colour. The lean-to form with a central sash window still exists on the north-east elevation but is adjoined by a brick addition with a gable roof. The window in this section has a corrugated iron awning supported on timber brackets.

¹⁷ This detail is also present at the Narrogin Post Office. At Wagin, the modelling is created by chamfering the brick edges rather than recessing selected courses.

¹⁸ At Narrogin and Wagin the stucco bands are the same colour as other rendered elements making a more effective contrast.

The current standard Australia Post fitout divides the interior space of *Katanning Post Office* into a public foyer and retail section at the front of the building and a general work area behind. Whilst similar, the partitioning layout is not identical to the post offices at Wagin and Narrogin. A heavy metal door in the north-west corner leads to the strong room, constructed in reinforced brick walls. The adjacent timber doors open onto the service area, store and staffrooms.

The new fitout to the post office is approximately three years old and it is likely that many of the internal finishes were upgraded at that time. Walls are plastered and the timber floor is carpeted. Only the high, painted, timber board ceiling retains any of the atmosphere of the original construction although this has been punctuated with a regular array of holes associated with the mechanical ventilation system. Vertical venetian blinds are suspended across the windows of the side elevations.

Since construction of *Katanning Post Office*, major alterations to the fabric have occurred mainly within the back service areas. The gable end extension to the north-east elevation appears on a drawing dating from 1953, but it has not been possible to date its construction more accurately. The new telephone exchange was built in 1953 and the partitioning for the exchange room within *Katanning Post Office* was removed. The cycle store in the north-west corner was added in 1961 and, at the same time, general repairs and maintenance were carried out. The south-west lobby was extended at the same time as the installation of the current fitout.

The cladding to the roof top ventilator is missing but overall the fabric is in good condition and well maintained.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.