



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.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE¹

The place is a competent and typical example of the work of the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing, designed for the north of Western Australia in the 1940s, taking account of the tropical climate of the region. (Criterion 1.1)

The place, together with *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group* and *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing*, forms a significant cultural environment in that these structures are the only obvious remnants of the 'old' settlement of Fitzroy Crossing. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The former post office and quarters, windmill, water tanks and tank stands, laundry, garage, generator room, L.L.E. building and remnants of a former river crossing frame, comprise a complex of structures associated with the daily functioning of a Government communications facility in a remote location in the north of Western Australia from 1948 to 1985. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) provided an essential service for people living in a remote area and, to a lesser degree, provided a setting where those people could enjoy random instances of social contact. (Criterion 4.1)

¹ 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.

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) is a rare example in the north of Western Australia of a substantially intact public building from the 1940s. An original telephone switchboard remains extant in the former post office area. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) is a representative example of a public building designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing in the north of Western Australia in the 1940s and 50s. Its style, materials and details were commonly used in that period. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) is in good condition. Both the site and the building are well maintained by the Aboriginal community who manage Darlanguunaya Backpackers.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) retains a medium level of integrity. Although no longer used as a post office, the original intention of the place is clear. The original 'Fitzroy Crossing Post Office' sign remains visible on the front facade of the building, although the side of the building now carries the words 'Welcome to Darlanguunaya Backpackers'. Internally the public areas of the post office are clearly evident although the main counter has been removed. The former residential areas are used for their original purpose as are the kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) retains a high degree of authenticity. The building remains substantially as constructed in 1948 with the addition of metal vertical metal sunscreens to the front verandah carried out in 1969, enclosure of the sleep-out and back verandah with glass, the loss of balustrade details to the steps and the addition of a new bathroom. Internal and external details remain substantially intact, including the aluminium louvres which have been removed from numerous buildings of similar age and detail.

The site also has medium to high authenticity. A number of original outbuildings remain extant, although some of the landscaping is of recent origin.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Dr Cathie Clement, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Rosemary Rosario, Architectural Heritage Consultant.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office* was established on 15 November 1948, on high ground situated to the west of *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing*, in premises now run by Darlanguyaya Backpackers. These premises replaced an earlier post office and quarters which, located approximately two miles (3.2 kilometres) to the north-west, had replaced the locality's first telegraph station. The latter building was located at Blue Bush Swamp to the south-east.² In each selection of a new location for the buildings, government officials were endeavouring to find a place, firstly, where business could be conducted despite the occasional flooding of the river and, secondly, where isolation, particularly during flooding, was not excessive.³

The Commonwealth Government acquired Location 22 for the Post Office in December 1945 and made provision on the 1945/46 Draft Estimates to erect a new post office and quarters and a lineman's residence. A decision was taken to build only the new post office and quarters and to make do with shifting the lineman's quarters from the old site. The work was completed, except for a few minor details, in November 1948, at an estimated cost of £12,000. The lineman's quarters were shifted to the site shortly afterwards and, instead of being positioned to the rear of the post office and quarters as originally planned, were placed on the western side of that building. The funds set aside for removal and erection of the lineman's quarters came to £13,500.⁴

The new post office was situated between the Australian Inland Mission Hospital and the place now known as *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group*. Vacant land separated these groups of buildings, both from one another and from the Crossing Inn further down the river. This vacant land comprised part of the stock route set apart under Reserve No. 12475 and part of the Brooking Springs Station pastoral lease.⁵ The government buildings were thus set not in a townsite but on small surveyed locations surrounded by Crown Land.

² National Archives of Australia, hereafter NAA, (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, *Fitzroy Crossing – PMG Acquisition of Site for Post Office*, p. [c. 35]; *Government Gazette*, 27 October 1905, p. 3234; State Records Office of Western Australia, hereafter SROWA, AN 5/1, Police Department, Acc 430, 280/91, Chief Office File.

³ *Northern Public Opinion*, 27 October 1899; NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, p. 6.

⁴ 'Extract from *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. 234, dated 6th December, 1945.' held in NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35; NAA (WA), PP280/1, P1946/47/309, *Fitzroy Crossing Erect New Post Office*, pp. [7a] and 166; SROWA, AN 5/3, Police Department, Acc 430, 2539/48, Annual Report 1947–48. General File; NAA (WA), K1201/1, EW4841, *Fitzroy Crossing – Post Office and Linesman's Quarters, 1947*; NAA (WA), K1201/1, WAC4732, *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office and Quarters – Drainage and Water Supply, 1947*.

⁵ NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, pp. 6 and 7.

Customers visiting the Post Office climbed a set of steps at the front of the building, passed through a porch, and entered the public space in front of the post office counter. This public space and the room that comprised the post office occupied the western end of the building. A small storage area located adjacent to the rear door and steps made up balance of the post office space. The remainder of the building - the postmaster's quarters - comprised a living room, two bedrooms, a sleep out, front and back verandahs, a bathroom, WC, pantry, and kitchen under the main roof, and a laundry attached to the rear of the kitchen.⁶

In this period, postmasters supplied their own furniture and household goods. This arrangement posed problems if transfers took place in the wet season because, if the roads were closed, the postmaster might well arrive long before the bulk of his possessions. When Postmaster Sleader arrived in November 1950, for example, and no accommodation was available at the Crossing Inn, he and his family had to camp in the quarters using beds, linen and crockery loaned by the hospital staff and the police. The quarters were, however, comparatively comfortable because the building had been 'specially designed to meet tropical conditions'.⁷

The postmaster's workload in the early 1950s was diverse but not heavy. During the year 1951–1952, for example, Sleader handled 6961 ordinary postal articles in the outgoing mail and more than 12,000 in the incoming mail. He had to sort the incoming items but did not have to organise delivery. The recipients either came to the post office or faced having their mail returned unclaimed. There were seven subscribers connected to the telephone exchange run by Sleader and only one public telephone. Being without a coin slot, it was located at the Post Office so people could pay at the counter when they made local or trunk calls.⁸

This volume of business was barely enough to justify the existence of an official post office and its mandatory postmaster but, in May 1953, a report explained the need for its retention as follows:

The old-established Fitzroy Crossing Grade 1 Post Office serves residents of that relatively small isolated outpost, in addition to those engaged on cattle and sheep raising pursuits on widely dispersed pastoral properties in the huge central Kimberley District. A Lineman is also stationed at the locality.

In normal circumstances the present-day volume of business transacted at Fitzroy Crossing would be insufficient to justify its existing status, but in view of peculiar local conditions including the desirability of maintaining morse code telegraph facilities and meteorological observations combined with the fact that the office concerned is housed in a newly constructed departmental building and the distinct possibility of future development throughout the Kimberley District, any action to reduce it to Non-Official status at this juncture could hardly be recommended.⁹

Some scaling down of the government's commitment to the locality evidently occurred, however, because, by July 1954, the lineman's quarters had been removed from the site. The telegraph service remained in place

⁶ NAA (WA), K1201/1, WA 8261, Fitzroy Crossing Post Office, 1947.

⁷ NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary] Fitzroy Crossing, 1950 to 1980; NAA (WA), K676/1, 14/4/151, Staff establishment Fitzroy Crossing Post Office [Australian Postal Commission / Postmaster General's Department], 1940 to 1986, no pagination.

⁸ NAA (WA), K676/1, 14/4/151.

⁹ *ibid.*

but line problems appear to have been handled by a lineman calling at Fitzroy Crossing while on patrol from Halls Creek.¹⁰

In 1957, when Postmaster Joss took over Sleader's duties, he managed to get his furniture to the Crossing before his family arrived. He soon found, however, that the challenges of living and working in this remote sub-tropical locality were not restricted to the wet season. Within days of taking over, he began to experience problems with the lighting plant, a necessary commodity in a locality where each pastoral station, commercial enterprise and home was responsible for its own power generation. Then, only days after his family arrived, an un-seasonal flood caused the Fitzroy River to rise about 12 feet (3.66 metres) over *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* and thus prevented vehicles from crossing the river for nine days. Ironically, it was at this time that Joss began to have problems with the windmill pump that drew the bore water for the post office quarters.¹¹

Joss had noted a need for renovations to the post office and quarters on 19 June 1957 but it was 10 September 1958 before an inspection organised by the Department of Works and Housing identified necessary repairs and maintenance. No urgency was attached to this work and, after the cost was estimated at £1200 on 8 November 1960, a requisition form was submitted in February 1962 and another inspection carried out the following April. That inspection revealed a need for additional work and, because this meant an increase in cost, the matter was deferred until the 1962–1963 financial year. Joss may have taken some consolation from the fact that the drilling of a new bore, another job stemming from the 1958 inspection, was commissioned within a year of the inspection. Leo Guger, a contractor from Derby, completed the sinking of the new bore in January 1960. In 1964, when the other work was eventually carried out, a shed, sewerage and a pump were added to the post office and quarters.¹²

Telecommunications in the Kimberley changed during the 1960s with the introduction of new technology for trunk calls. The Perth–Derby radio-telephone system had opened on 27 October 1959, replacing the use of telegraph facilities for trunk calls to Perth via Carnarvon. In 1963, radio-telephone transmission and receiving sites were selected at Fitzroy Crossing but, after severe atmospheric interference made it very difficult to hold a conversation, it was decided that this radio system was not an appropriate one. Consequently, in 1966, work commenced on an upgrading of the telegraph line to two-wires so that telephone trunk calls could be made. This service was introduced in 1967, providing telephone connections between Fitzroy Crossing and the rest of Australia.¹³ One

¹⁰ NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, citing a notation in the amendments listed on the Block Plan for the post office and quarters at Fitzroy Crossing; NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary], entry for 14 May 1957.

¹¹ NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary], entries for May and June 1957.

¹² *ibid.*, entries for dates noted in the text; NAA (WA), PP 280/1, P1961/62/1243, PMG [Postmaster General's] Fitzroy Crossing - post office exchange and quarters repairs and maintenance, pp. 1 and 4–6; NAA (WA), PP 280/1, P1959/60/917, PMG [Postmaster General's] Fitzroy Crossing - water supply, pp. 1, 4, 8, 18 and 42; NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, citing a notation in the amendments listed on the Block Plan for the post office and quarters at Fitzroy Crossing.

¹³ *Telecom W.A.*, February 1981, p. 15, copy provided by John Moynihan; Leigh Edmonds, *The Vital Link: A History of Main Roads Western Australia 1926–1996*, UWA Press, Nedlands,

outcome of these changes was that, in August 1967, land was taken from *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group* to the west in connection with the establishment of a radio-telephone receiving station near the post office.¹⁴

During the 1960s, there was no anticipation of growth in the small settlement at Fitzroy Crossing. A report prepared in 1965 read, in part, as follows:

Fitzroy Crossing is situated in the West Kimberley District at latitude 18° 11' south, longitude 125° 36' east. It is some 1,560 miles by road from Perth, 165 miles by road east of Derby and is on the Great Northern Highway. Regular flights of Mac.Robertson Miller Airlines serve the town and surrounding stations. Road Services from Derby also transport food and other commodities to the centre. With a town population of only approximately 33 persons, there is virtually no chance of the place developing to any extent. Cattle raising is the only industry of the District and the township serves as a meeting place for nearby cattle station personnel.

2. Telegraph traffic is light and is exchanged by medium of telephone with Derby. A 3 BZ radio transceiver is installed for emergent clearance of traffic.

3. Mail matter is distributed through the Post Restante only. No roadside mail services operate from Fitzroy Crossing and no private boxes are installed.

4. Social Service payments are negligible and do not necessitate any special arrangements. Indeed, the whole office is relatively quiet and one officer can comfortably handle all the work load offering...

7. Fitzroy Crossing is little more than a village with only a half dozen or so buildings. It has remained static for many years and there is little likelihood of it ever progressing beyond its present status.¹⁵

In 1967, a report revealed that 110 individuals made up the total population served by the Post Office. The appearance of the place was good at this time, but external repainting was necessary. Other renovations and general repairs had been identified during an asset inspection on 3 October 1966, and provision for the expenditure of \$3,000 was made on the Draft 1967/68 Repairs and Maintenance Program. The work was undertaken by Kimberley Building Contractors (Broome), in the second half of 1968, as part of a \$13,890 contract for 'Repairs & Minor New Wks. Post Office & other buildings' at Fitzroy Crossing.¹⁶ In 1969, work connected with telephone trunk line services took place when a teleradio aerial mast, a river crossing frame, and an associated building were constructed behind the post office and quarters.¹⁷

Although services provided by the Post Office were improving, wet season flooding still affected the availability of these services. The nature of the population was changing too, partly due to the surrounding stations

1997, p. 156; NAA (WA), K1209/1, NN, Fitzroy Crossing Post Office – correspondence, cards, photographs, press cuttings, 1960 to 1980, citing a transcript of an address given by Mr L Caudle on 5 July 1983.

¹⁴ NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary] Fitzroy Crossing, 1950 to 1980; NAA (WA), PP520/1, 1972/175, [Property and Services Branch] Fitzroy Crossing – Postmaster General's Radio/telephone site, 1943 to 1974, p. 45; *Government Gazette* (WA), 4 August 1967, p. 1932.

¹⁵ NAA (WA), K433/1, XP 1064, Fitzroy Crossing post office, p. [8].

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. [2, 3, 4 and 9]; NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary], entry dated 1 November 1968.

¹⁷ NAA (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, citing alterations and a notation in the amendments listed on the Block Plan for the post office and quarters at Fitzroy Crossing.

dispensing with Aboriginal workers following the introduction of award wages. In 1969, interested governments departments were advised of a proposal to gazette a new townsite to cater for future planning for schools, hospitals, other public buildings and the residential requirements of the area.¹⁸

In January 1974, it was announced that a new Fitzroy Crossing Hospital was to be built at a cost of \$250,000. This announcement signalled the forthcoming relocation of services to the new townsite. A newspaper report published in July stated that the first buildings on the new site were 'expected to be the town's hospital and a policeman's house'. The new hospital opened in June 1976, the new police complex and court house opened in 1978, and, eventually, on 1 February 1985, the official opening of the new post office took place.¹⁹

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr), no longer required for official business, was vested in the Shire of Derby/West Kimberley and subsequently restored and refurbished by the Darlŋgunaya Aboriginal Corporation.²⁰ The corporation currently uses the main building to provide backpacker accommodation. The place is well maintained and the attractive grounds provide a welcome respite from the harshness of the surrounding landscape.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) is located in the old Fitzroy Crossing settlement approximately two kilometres north-east of the current town centre. The building is located on the southern side of Russ Road which fronts the remaining lots and buildings of the old settlement, including the former Police Station and the site of the former Australian Inland Mission Hospital. Russ Road continues to the east to cross the Fitzroy via *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* where it becomes Yarabi Road.

The site of *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr)* comprises the former post office building, now used for backpacker accommodation and managed by the Darlŋgunaya Aboriginal community, and various small structures, out buildings and landscape features. *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr)* is located on the north eastern portion of the site addressing Russ Road. There is an area of lawn and trees in front of the building and a recent post and rail fence with steel framed and cyclone mesh gates. There is a gravel parking area to the west of the building where the former linesman's residence was located until its removal in 1954. There is no evidence of this former structure extant. There are several outbuildings including a timber and iron shed of recent origin on the western side of the site. Garage, generator room, L.L.E. building and remnants of a former river crossing frame are located on the south-western portion of the site. These

¹⁸ SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, Fitzroy Crossing, p. 3.

¹⁹ *West Australian*, 28 January 1974, p. 5; NAA (WA), K1209/1, NN, cutting from *West Australian*, 5 July 1974, p. 4; *West Australian*, 12 June 1976, p. 19; Derby Chamber of Commerce/Derby Tourist Bureau, *Derby and Fitzroy Crossing Information Directory*, 1999, p. 23.

²⁰ Heritage and Conservation Professionals in association with National Heritage, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley: Municipal Inventory, prepared for The Shire, Derby, June 1995, Heritage Sites Assessments, pp. 109–10.

retain some original sections of timber framing which probably date from the 1940s and 50s.

Immediately behind *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr)* is a laundry constructed in 1972, a windmill and tank stand dating from 1947 are located on the western side of the building and a water tank and rotary clothes line located to the east. The area is extensively landscaped with rocks, logs, stone garden furniture, a barbecue, trees and shrubs. Generally the landscape features are of recent origin.

The laundry is a rectangular structure with walls clad with flat asbestos cement sheets, a concrete floor slab and a low pitched metal deck roof with a solar hot water system. There are several murals painted on the walls of the building dating from the recent use of the building for backpackers' accommodation. The style of the murals is highly decorative and it is likely that they were painted by members of the Aboriginal community associated with the current management and use of the site. The other outbuildings are generally timber or steel framed with flat asbestos cement sheet or corrugated iron cladding and with corrugated iron roofs.

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) is a single storey building constructed on 250mm x 250mm concrete stumps that raise the floor level of the building approximately 1.2m above the ground. The building is timber framed with external cladding of mint green painted, flat asbestos cement sheets with matching cover strips. The words 'Welcome to Darlungunaya Backpackers' are painted on the western wall. Windows are timber framed. To the front elevation these comprise groups of casement windows on either side of glass French doors, with panels of aluminium louvres below sill height and above door head height. The back verandahs have been enclosed with banks of timber framed hopper windows. The roof is medium pitched, approx. 25°, constructed of short lengths of corrugated galvanised iron with timber storm battens. The roof is gabled over the front entrance to the former public post office area with timber vents in the gable ends on the north and south elevations. The words 'Fitzroy Crossing Post Office' remain extant on the front facade under the gable. The roof is hipped over the eastern end of the building and over the kitchen area. Roof plumbing comprises ogee gutters and round downpipes and appears from physical inspection to have been recently replaced.

The building is T shaped in plan with the main structure oriented to address the street and comprising the former public area of the post office at the western end and the former postmaster's quarter at the eastern end. To the rear (south) a separate wing opening to the west contains the kitchen and original bathroom. A second bathroom has been constructed adjacent to the original bathroom, presumably to provide for the needs of residents of the backpackers' accommodation.

There are several entry points to the building. The main entrance is via a flight of steps on the western end of the front of the building which lead to the front porch of the former public area. There is a second flight of steps on the front of the building leading to the verandah of the former quarters. There are two further flights of steps to the back verandah and to the kitchen. All the steps comprise timber treads on steel frames. All the

balustrades have been altered from original detail and have lost timber uprights.

The former post office area now comprises one open space which is used as a television and sitting room for the backpackers hostel. The room extends the width of the building, and whilst it no longer contains the original counter and other fittings associated with the former post office use, an original telephone switch board remains extant. The former residential section of the building comprises a living room which is currently furnished with table and chairs associated with the backpacker accommodation, and two bedrooms at the eastern end. All the rooms open onto the front verandah. The living area opens onto the back verandah and the bedrooms open onto a former sleep out. Both the former sleep out and the back verandah have been enclosed with glazing. The internal (south) walls of the living area and bedrooms are constructed of timber framed panels of windows, glass doors and aluminium louvres, similar to the detail of the front windows.

There is a bathroom of recent origin opening off the former sleepout behind the bedrooms. The adjacent service wing contains the original toilet and bathroom, a pantry and the original kitchen. The kitchen contains a Metters stove in the original fireplace opening. The original chimney remains extant.

The building has undergone several alterations from original detail. These include addition of metal vertical sunscreens to the front verandah (carried out in 1969), enclosure of previous fly-wired areas including the former sleep-out and back verandah with glass windows and the construction of an additional bathroom adjacent to the original bathroom. In addition the balustrades to all the stairs have been altered.

The building retains a high level of original detail including aluminium louvres which were used extensively for Public Works Department buildings in the Kimberley at the period but have been replaced in a large number of cases. The building is well maintained and is in good condition.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

A former post office of similar detail to *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr)* remains extant at Warmun (formerly known as Turkey Creek). This building is not identical to the Fitzroy Crossing building but contains a number of similar design features and details. It is also substantially intact and is currently used as the Kelarriny Arts Centre. The situation is similar to Fitzroy Crossing in that the realignment of Great Northern Highway has by-passed the building, which is located on the original alignment.

Fitzroy Crossing Post Office (fmr) contains features typical of Commonwealth and State Government buildings in the north of Western Australia dating from the late 1940s and 50s. Most, however, are less intact.

13.4 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH
