



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

Midland Post Office is a fine example of Federation Free Style architecture, exhibiting an individual character for civic buildings in an important (and growing) regional centre in the early 1900s. (Criterion 1.1)

The building contributes to the aesthetic qualities of the central town and streetscape, providing a balance with the two-storey hotel located opposite. (Criterion 1.3)

The building is an integral part of the historic civic precinct in the heart of Midland. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The building is important as evidence of a way of life in which the Postmaster and family were expected to live within the complex of the post office. (Criterion 2.1)

The building is of historic value for its association with the commitment by State and Federal Governments to the provision and growth of postal and telegraphic services to the railway and industrial centres in the early part of the century. (Criterion 2.2)

Midland Post Office is a fine example of the civic architecture of Hillson Beasley, Principal Government Architect, 1897-1905. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Midland Post office contributes to the community's sense of place in the historic and civic precinct of the town as the location of postal and communication services for social and business activities. (Criteria 4.1 and 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

Midland Post Office demonstrates design elements of the Federation Free Style representative of buildings of the period. It is rare in the scale of its postal hall, usually confined to main city post offices. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Midland Post Office is a fine representative example of Federation Free Style, and contributes to a civic group of buildings. Its landmark qualities and the scale of its postal hall, express its importance as a regional facility. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The building fabric is in good condition, particularly its two street facades and the interior of the postal hall. Whilst alterations have occurred to the layout on the upper floor, and additions and alterations have been made to the rear of the building, the building is structurally sound. Reinstatement of the rear facade to original condition could be achieved if required and may be undertaken in the currently proposed work. *Midland Post Office* is in good condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The building no longer serves its original function to accommodate living quarters, and the telecommunications services have been relocated. Alterations to the first floor rooms, and the removal of equipment, obscures their original role as a telegraph and telephone exchange. *Midland Post Office* therefore retains a modest degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The alterations to the building fabric have been minimal except for the additions and alterations to the rear facade, which could be reinstated. Alterations to the interior of the postal chamber in 1994/95 are of a lightweight nature and do interfere with the fabric of the place and could be removed if required and the original space reinstated. A high proportion of original external and internal detailing remains and therefore, *Midland Post Office* retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The following is largely based on the Heritage Assessment Report for the *Midland Post Office* by Bruce Callow, 1994.

Midland Post Office is the second recorded postal building on the site at the north-west corner of Great Eastern Highway and Helena Street. Prior to this

site first being used in 1897, a post office had existed in an unknown location in Midland from 1895.³²

The presence of the new building coincided with the completion of the Midland Railway Company's works to connect Midland Junction with the Government line at Walkaway, south-east of Geraldton and inland from Greenough.³³

The townsite of Midland Junction was gazetted in 1890, to accommodate the activity associated with the building of the privately owned Midland Railway. Although, the initial work of the town began in 1886, delays in construction and the preference for Guildford as the railway terminus, may account for the absence of a Post Office until the promised relocation of the Government's Railway workshops from Fremantle in 1895.³⁴

Between 1895 and 1897, the population of Midland Junction doubled, and by 1901, when the stalled process of transferring the Government Railway Workshops to Midland Junction was successfully revived, the population neared 1800. By 1905, the Railway Workshops were fully operational, and the Midland region could boast the *Government Central Engine Depot*, local brickworks and *Hoskins Foundry*, to manufacture steel pipes for the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme.³⁵

From 1895, Midland Junction was officially called Helena Vale but common practise prevailed and the name Midland Junction was restored in 1901.³⁶ The contract for the *Helena Vale Post Office* (most likely designed under the auspices of the Public Works Department architect George Temple-Poole),³⁷ was let to J Whitelaw on 12 March, 1897, for £1,569/8/08.³⁸ The commission was probably convenient for Whitelaw as he had completed the nearby *Helena Vale School and Headmaster's Quarters* in December, 1896.³⁹

Descriptions and photographs of the 1897 Post Office indicate it was a 'brick two storey construction consisting of a public office, operations room and quarters for a postmaster.'⁴⁰ Ingrid Van Bremen describes it as a Post Office of the 'Italianate Villa and Corner Site' category and that it was

³² Pope, B., Bush, F., Broomfield, W., & Kelsall, D., 'Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia owned by Australian Post', (for The National Trust of Australia, WA, 1993) p. 42.

³³ Bourke, M., J., *On the Swan*, (University of Western Australia Press, 1987) pp. 248-250 and 257-259.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 255-264.

³⁵ *Swan Express*, 26 January, 1901, and *ibid.*, Bourke, pp. 264 and 269.

³⁶ *ibid.*, Bourke, p. 260.

³⁷ Van Bremen, I. H., *The New Architecture of the Gold Boom*, Appendix-Biographies, cites George Temple-Poole was appointed Colonial Architect in 1890, and from 1891 until his retirement in January, 1897, was assistant Engineer in Chief of the Public Works Department.

³⁸ *ibid.*, Pope, Appendix 1, and *Western Australian Government Gazette*, p. 141, for Post Office tender acceptances.

³⁹ *ibid.*, van Bremen, Appendix C, for Schools Tender acceptances and completions.

⁴⁰ *Echo*, 28 July, 1991 p. 21, for photograph c1901. *Centenary of Midland 1886-1986*, p. 23 for photograph c1906, and *ibid.*, Van Bremen, Appendix C. For historic photographs see collection MPL/LHC at Midland Public Library.

sited on the corner of a major intersection, its two double storey brick gables at right angles to each other addressed both streets, with a large arched window to one and an awning to the other. In the arms of these two gables was an entrance porch in the form of a quarter circle turning the corner'.⁴¹

The location of the post office (and its 1913 replacement) sits well into the pattern described by Pope's study of Western Australian Post Offices.⁴² Although, the railway station (1895, not at the present site) was located some distance away, the *Freemasons Hotel* (c.1897) was located diagonally opposite, with the railway line to Geraldton passing between the Hotel and Post Office, and continuing to what is now part of The Crescent.⁴³

Reasons why such a substantial building, of a comparable cost to the East Perth Post Office, was demolished to make way for the new design of 1913, have not been officially established. The local newspaper, the *Swan Express*, described the existing Post Office as a 'dog kennel', and used the visit of the Postmaster General and Federal politicians in March, 1912, to report that 'the building was utterly unsuitable. It was inadequate for the needs of the public...positively insanitary unhealthy on account...of the absence of ventilation'.⁴⁴ The action to replace an existing building is not without precedent; the *Beverley Post Office* suffered the same fate in the same year. Population growth in Midland Junction, both real and anticipated which was reflected in the number of public buildings completed in the pre World War One period, may have justified a larger Post Office. An indication of the population growth in Midland Junction at this time is supported by the substantial additions to the *Government School*, York Road (Great Eastern Highway). Student numbers increased from 280 in 1901, to 610 in 1910, and also resulted in the commissioning of six separate building contracts in that period.⁴⁵

Predictions of a population growth to 20,000 were not substantiated, but in the period following the opening of the Railway Workshops, a number of prominent public buildings were constructed including, *Council Chambers* and *Town Hall* (1906), *Court House* (1910), *Carnegie Library* (1912) and the present *Midland Post Office* (1913).⁴⁶

Although, the Commonwealth Government had taken over responsibility for Posts and Telegraphs with Federation in 1901, the State Public Works Department (PWD) Architectural Division was responsible for the design of Post Offices until 1925.⁴⁷ Chief architect, Hillson Beasley's annual report dated 8 August, 1913, cites work commenced on *Midland Junction Post Office*

⁴¹ *ibid.*, van Bremen, p. 343.

⁴² *ibid.*, Pope, pp. 10-12.

⁴³ MPL/LHC for photograph no. 70, and *ibid.*, Bourke, for map p. 261.

⁴⁴ *Swan Express*, 15 March, 1912.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, van Bremen, p. 343, and Sweeney, V., and McKernan, L., *A History of Education in Midland*, (1972).

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, Bourke, pp. 271-279.

⁴⁷ Molyneux, I., *Looking Around Perth: a guide to the architecture of Perth and surrounding towns*. (Wescolour Press, 1981) p. 116, and *ibid.*, Pope, pp. 8-9.

on behalf of the Commonwealth, with an estimated cost of £5,600.⁴⁸ The report of the following year dated 10 November, 1914, describes the building as 'now complete...with a total cost of £4,903/13/05.'⁴⁹ The acceptance of a tender for £95 on 2 July, 1912 from J Livingstone for the construction of a toolshed is reported in the Government Gazette. Various tenders were received for the purchase and removal of building material in May, 1913 (approx £50), and March, 1914 (£40).⁵⁰ They possibly relate to the demolition of the old Post Office and the construction of the new one.

The importance of the rebuilding of the *Midland Post Office* is indicated by its construction cost of £4,903. In the period from 1904 to the end of World War One, *Midland Junction Post Office* was the most expensive structures since the building of *Fremantle Post Office* (Market St) of 1906, which cost £7,926/12/04.⁵¹ Aside from the *General Post Office*, Perth (£232,700), the only post office building of the fifteen built in the period of 1912-14, nearest to its equivalent value is *Kellerberrin Post Office* (£2,882/09/08).

Hillson Beasley (1853-1917) was thirty when he arrived in Melbourne from a three year period in the Cape area of South Africa. His initial education and architecture articles were undertaken in England, and after working and teaching in Melbourne, he joined many of the other 'immigrant Architects' who came to the West when a downturn in the Eastern States coincided with gold related boom conditions in Western Australia.⁵² In 1896, he was appointed specification draughtsman in the PWD Perth, and by July 1897 was Assistant Architect under J H Grainger (Principal Architect March 1897- May 1905). During his time with the PWD he is credited with the design of many significant buildings including, *Art Gallery of Western Australia* (1906), *Fremantle Post Office* (1906), *Public Library*, James Street, Perth (1911) and *General Post Office*, Perth (1914, in association with J S Murdoch).

Hillson Beasley's design has been variously described as 'part of the revival of interest in developments in English Classicism, formal composition and academic styles';⁵³ 'Queen Anne Style',⁵⁴ and, in a more detailed description:

'the Building reflects the revival of interest in the middle Stuart period of domestic architecture which occurred in England and Australia. Architecture resulting from this revival is sometimes referred to as Edwardian or Queen Anne in style. It follows neo-classical rules of proportion and detail but is generally it is richer and more florid than Georgian or neo-Georgian architecture.'⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Votes and Proceedings, 3rd Session, 8th Parliament 1912-13, vol. 2, Annual Report Public Works Department, p. 452.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 1914-15, vol. 2, Annual report Public Works Department, p. 804.

⁵⁰ Western Australian Government Gazette 1912, pp. 2227 and 2963, and in 1913, pp. 1707 and 1826, and in 1914, pp. 1385 and 2080.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, Pope, Appendix 1, p. 143, and Appendix 4, p. 159.

⁵² *ibid.*, van Bremen, Appendix-Biographies, and Pitt-Morison, M., 'Immigrant Architects', File D 29, University of Western Australia Architecture Department.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Molyneux, p. 48, No. 276.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Bourke, p. 279.

⁵⁵ Ferguson, R. J., and Stephenson, G., 'Survey of historic buildings in the Shire of Swan', 1975, pp. 77-78.

There are elements of Beasley's design for *Perth Modern School* (1910), particularly in the roof elements which relate closely to the design of *Midland Junction Post Office*.⁵⁶

The transition from posts and telegraphs to simply postal services resulted in the conversion of the exchange, battery and associated rooms on the upper level to additional mail sorting rooms. Similarly, the former Postmaster's four bedroom quarters on the upper level were converted to office space. The kitchen and drawing rooms on the ground floor level were converted to staff amenities with additions, to the Great Eastern Highway frontage, for more public letterboxes. The stair at ground floor level was also altered at the lowest landing to split and continue in two directions. Further comparison can be made from the 'metricated' drawing to sketches of alterations, principally to the postal hall, by architects, Dick Brokenshire and Associates dated April, 1991. The sketches show how the original large postal hall, which had been partially screened behind the counter, could be opened up again as we see it today.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Midland Post Office is a two-storey brick building constructed in 1913, in a Federation Free Style. The building is sited on the street boundary making a strong public statement in conjunction with the adjoining *Midland Town Hall* to the west on Great Eastern Highway, and the *Court House* to the north on Helena Street.

Midland Post Office is built of plain red brick, using a struck joint in a stretcher bond pattern. The external walls are a combination of incised bands of brickwork and rendered/stucco mouldings and panels. The roof is tiled, with dark red Swiss tiles that replaced red Marseilles tiles. The roof features a lantern, three dormer shaped vents, and two (originally four) brick and rendered moulded chimneys. The tall, 6 and 9 paned double hung windows, with painted moulded render surrounds, complete the strong but controlled street facades.

The ground floor windows feature unusual curved centre transoms. Combined with the roof dormers and lantern, the building is given an Arts and Crafts character to the otherwise English classical revival style. As with many buildings emanating from the Public Works at the time, under the signature of Hillson Beasley, the building falls within the category of Federation Free Style.⁵⁷ Comparisons can be made, particularly with the roof form, with Beasley's earlier 'West Building', *Perth Modern School* (1909-1910).

The front elevation to Great Eastern Highway is made up of two components, the large symmetrical Post Office building on the east, sitting forward of the Postmaster's quarters, abutting it on the west. The Postmaster's quarters are two-storeyed and smaller in scale to the main building.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Van Bremen, and *ibid.*, Molyneux, p. 46, No. 262.

⁵⁷ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, (Angus & Robertson, 1989) pp. 136-139.

An entry porch, to the two corners of the post office building, allows direct access to its imposing postal hall. Locating the Postmaster's quarters back from the building line differentiating its scale of distinction and for the provision of privacy, enabled the provision of the porch to the west corner. The verandah to the Postmaster's quarters is now enclosed to provide for additional public letterboxes and parcel storage. An additional verandah, in the original style, has been added to the western entry porch to the postal hall.

The northern elevation, to Helena Street, is generally intact, although a chimney has been removed. The austere rear elevation has undergone several additions and alterations including, the installation of balcony enclosures, services, covered areas, awnings and, most recently, a corrugated iron roof enclosing an external service lift.

General and delivery bike storage, public telephones and public letterboxes are housed in flat roofed outbuildings at the rear of the site. The buildings are of a small scale but detract from the main buildings, particularly those on the Helena Street frontage.

The ground floor level of *Midland Post Office* is dominated by a large postal hall. The hall runs the full depth of the building, and its scale is not evident from the exterior appearance of the building. The postal hall in its scale, is unlike post offices outside the city except for major centres such as Fremantle and large country towns. The central volume of the hall is dominated by four large square columns with a plaster panelled ceiling. Both the columns and the ceiling are decorated with plaster mouldings. The high ceiling space between the columns is now interrupted by suspended air conditioning ducts, which do not interfere with the original fabric. Renovations to the postal hall in 1991, included the removal of the front counter and low partitioning (c.1950-60). New low partitions screen perimeter office accommodation without encroaching on the overall volume. The hall displays new standard Australia Post shop fittings.

Substantial changes have been made to the ground floor level of the Postmaster's quarters. As the front verandah has been enclosed and extended to provide additional letterboxes and parcel storage, the rear verandah has also been enclosed to provide staff toilets. The original rear timber panelled door with glazed side and toplights is still in place. Room uses have altered, and the lower flight of the stairs have been reconfigured to allow direct access to the front and rear of the building.

The balustrade, newels and handrail to the stair to the Postmaster's (sleeping) quarters and telephone exchange, have been replicated. The former upstairs sitting room and bathroom walls have been removed to provide open office space. An opening has been formed to provide an outlook over the stairwell. The stair configuration turns and continues a small flight to allow additional height over the postal hall below. At this upper level, significant alterations to the building fabric have been made with the removal of internal walls to create larger spaces.

Relocation of the telephone exchange to a separate building provided more space for postal and mail sorting facilities. The rear balcony has been enclosed to provide additional floor space.

Few internal decorative finishes remain. The upper floor level ceilings lack cornice decoration except for the former battery room, which has been divided by a framed wall complete with vertical boarded timber dado.

The interior features two decorative arches in the passage outside the former battery room, supported on ornamental brackets. The fireplace on the west wall of the postal hall retains its existing surround, all other fireplaces have been removed or covered over. Internal joinery comprised of four timber panelled doors (not all remain), moulded architraves and skirtings. A second stair, in the north east corner of the building remains reasonably intact. Its return back into the postal hall has been sealed but an extension has been made from the last landing to the rear yard for egress.

Until the late 1980s, this group of buildings established the 'civic heart of Midland'.⁵⁸ However, the new Police and Court House buildings, *Department of Land Administration* building and large new shopping centres have dispersed the heart of Midland. Nevertheless, these buildings remain as an historic and civic precinct that contributes to the identification of the old centre of Midland. In 1994/95, the postal chamber is undergoing a refit to make it more functional as offices. According to Bruce Callow, the consulting architect, the partitioning used will be lightweight so as to not permanently damage the fabric of the building and could be removed easily. Similarly, mechanical services are being designed so as not to impact on the building.⁵⁹

Midland Post Office contributes to the streetscape, providing balance to the two-storey *Freemason's Hotel*, located diagonally opposite (across the intersection of Great Eastern Highway and Helena Street).

13.3 REFERENCES

Callow, B., *Heritage Assessment for Midland Post Office* (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, 1994).

Apperly, A., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, (Angus & Robertson, 1989).

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Molyneux, No. 45, Midland Courthouse, p. 45.

⁵⁹ Correspondence held on HCWA file 2513.