



1. **Data Base No** 1010
2. **Name** Fremantle Synagogue (Former) (1902)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry** The Fremantle Synagogue, associated buildings and the land on which it stands, being Lot Fremantle 1375 on Diagram 60/65, comprised in C/T 840/86.
4. **Local Government Area** City of Fremantle
5. **Location** 92 South Terrace, Fremantle
6. **Owner** City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former Fremantle Synagogue was the first purpose built synagogue constructed in Western Australia. The first Jewish congregation was established in Fremantle in August 1887 when Mr Laurence Alexander, the manager of Falk and Company, was elected first President of the Congregation. Weekly meetings were conducted, with Henry Seeligson as the acting lay reader, from September 1888.

By 1891, services were conducted by Rabbi A.T. Boas in the guard room of Fremantle Barracks, on South Terrace, and the congregation began to look for a permanent site on which to build a synagogue.¹ The congregation acquired Lot 1366 on Norfolk Street, land which Fremantle Council was keen to acquire to incorporate into Barrack Field. In 1895 a land swap was arranged with the State Government: Fremantle Council minutes indicating "that the Government will be prepared to grant to the Jewish community the site proposed in your letter to the 2nd ultima, conditionally that the trustees of that body transfer to the Crown Lot 1366, which will then be granted to the Fremantle Municipal Council".² Seven and a half months later, on the 16th April, 1896, Lot 1375 South Terrace was vested in Elias Solomon and W.F. Samson, as Trustees for the Jewish Congregation.³ The new site was a logical one, given it was adjacent to the Barracks where services were already being held.

Having gained possession of the South Terrace land it is surprising the congregation did not build a synagogue until 1902, by which time the Fremantle Jewish

¹ Yiswel, KKM *Fremantle Jewry*

² Council Minutes 3 September, 1895

³ *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*. Vol 2 (5) 1946-1947

congregation had grown to 60 or so. The architectural partnership of Oldham and Eales, noted for their recent design of the nearby Fremantle Markets, was given the commission. The foundation stone was laid by Elias Solomon, a Trustee of the Fremantle Hebrew congregation, former Mayor of Fremantle and, at the time, federal member for Fremantle, on 8th January 1902. Mr J. McCracken won the contract to build the synagogue, with a quote of £750.⁴

But the Jewish community's use of the Fremantle synagogue was short lived. An increase in the Jewish community in metropolitan Perth resulted in a second congregation being established in Perth in 1892.⁵ Over the next decade there was a gradual shift of the Jewish population to Perth, and in 1908 the Perth congregation assumed control of the declining Fremantle congregation's affairs.⁶ With the Governor's consent, the trustees of the Fremantle congregation exercised its power of sale and sold the synagogue site to the Perth body.⁷ Services continued in the Fremantle Synagogue until 1910, by which time the congregation was too small and services were discontinued.

The synagogue was subsequently sold and in 1913-14 the property was listed as being owned by a Mr Chapple. Various organisations, religious and otherwise, rented the premises until its sale to "Bill" Beer in 1922.⁸ Beer is listed as owner and occupier of an auction mart and residence on site in 1925, although the transfer of title did not occur until March 1932. At this time Beer applied for a building license to construct shops along the South Terrace frontage. A building license to a value of £650 was approved on 20 June 1932.⁹ Builders for the project were A.H. and H.A. Thorp of West Fremantle.¹⁰

The ownership of the property, which continued to be used for commercial purposes, passed to Richard and Dulcie Urwin in 1964 and then to the City of Fremantle in 1969. The City of Fremantle leased the former synagogue to a carpet dealer, Barri's Rugs, until 1985.¹¹

In 1976 an application was made to Fremantle City Council by the Perth Hebrew Congregation to remove the Star of David from the front gable of the synagogue.¹² It was the congregation's intended to incorporate the star in the new synagogue at Menora, as a means to commemorate the original Jewish community in Fremantle. Fremantle Council offered to supply the congregation with a replica of the star, leaving the original on the building.¹³

In 1984, a conservation assessment was completed by architect Ian Molyneux and Associates, with funding from the National Estates Grants Program. In 1986, R.

4 Yiswel, KKM *Fremantle Jewry*

5 Fremantle Council minutes 17 May 1976 p 21

6 Yiswel, KKM *Fremantle Jewry*

7 *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*. Vol 2 (5) 1946-1947

8 Yiswel, KKM *Fremantle Jewry*

9 Cited in Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia*. 1984 p 2,3

10 Fremantle City Library, Local History Collection item 296

11 "Carpet shop left afloat" *The West Australian* 13 December, 1985

12 Yiswel, KKM *Fremantle Jewry*

13 Fremantle Council minutes 17 May 1976 p21

McTiernan and his company "Skid Rose", successfully tendered for the lease and restoration of the building. The restorations cost approximately \$100,000 and were based upon Molyneux's plan. Restoration work included chipping back wall surfaces to expose the limestone walls in the shops, the addition of timber paneling and terra-cotta tiles and the conversion in early 1987 of the synagogue area into a display space for clothing, a gallery for art and a cafe. The side courtyard was extended and used for outdoor seating.

In 1991, the Fremantle City Council advertised for a new lessee for the premises.¹⁴ The place was subsequently leased for use as a cafe restaurant, its current use.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The synagogue is a single storey rectangular brick building situated on the north-eastern corner of Norfolk Street and South Terrace. At the time of construction the building backed on to Barrack Field on the east and the Fremantle Barracks on the south side.¹⁵

The synagogue was well assembled and designed in a simplified version of the Federation Romanesque style.¹⁶ It has a steeply pitched corrugated iron roof with deep decoratively worked gutter-boards.¹⁷ The front and side walls of the building are of tuck-pointed brick and the rear gable of limestone.

Decoration comprises shadow lines over arched window heads and a Star of David at the apex of the gabled parapet, together with stucco window sills, window head arches, quoins, pier copings, roof covings, and finials. The stucco dado is imitation coursed ashlar. Turrets flanking the facade and the side elevations have simple pilasters and blind window openings.¹⁸

Internal walls were originally finished with lime-plaster render with a dado mould run in.¹⁹ However, about 50% of the area has since been rendered in cement and painted.²⁰ The ceiling is of clear-finished Baltic pine, with a deep decoratively drilled jarrah cornice. The two decorative metal roses in the centre of the ceiling may have had gasoliers.²¹

¹⁴ *The West Australian* 9 Nov, 1991

¹⁵ Diagram of Town lot 1375, Town of Fremantle, 19 March 1891

¹⁶ *Apperley, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. (Angus and Roberston, North Ryde, 1989) p116-119*

¹⁷ *Molyneux, I. An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia. 1984*

¹⁸ National Trust exposition sheet.

¹⁹ *Molyneux, I. An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia. 1984 p3*

²⁰ *Molyneux, I. An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia. 1984 p3*

²¹ *Molyneux, I. An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia. 1984 p4*

In the 1920s, when the site was used for commerce and accommodation, brick and corrugated iron additions were built at the rear of the building. A building license was issued in 1925 for the garage built off Norfolk Street.

A verandah, evident in photographs taken in the 1920's, is assumed to be an earlier addition.²² The hoist arm on the north-west corner would suggest the verandah was erected in 1924, when Beer moved in his business. The verandah was demolished in 1932, to provide room for the shops along South Terrace. The date 1924, incorporated on the facade of the shops, would seem to refer to Beer's establishment at the site, rather than the construction date of the shops.

At the time of incorporation into the retail space the entrance to the synagogue was altered. There is evidence of the former front steps, from street level to the synagogue, under the existing internal steps.²³ The synagogue windows were covered by galvanised sheeting and the glazing painted over. Window joinery was left in a poor state of repair and was subjected to termite attack.²⁴ The north east shop wall is constructed of limestone, with a brick parapet, however the south east parapet-party wall is of face brickwork.²⁵

At some stage, the external walls, including the tuck pointed and face brickwork, stucco decorative elements and the incised stucco course, were painted. On the north western elevation the original tuck pointed brickwork and stucco details were merged together by cement rendering, apart from the area once occupied by a now demolished addition. However, the original exterior finish can still be seen on the south-eastern elevation.

In 1985 a restoration program was undertaken in accordance with the Molyneux report. The front facade of the synagogue was cleaned of paint, and the stucco work repainted. An extension was added to the rear, and rendered to match the Norfolk Street elevation. This extension partially blocked from view the two half windows in the rear elevation, the stucco detail of which echoed the decorative elements on the turrets. The original limestone wall along Norfolk Street was extended to the rear boundary. Internally, the windows were repaired and made functional and the limestone wall inside the shopfront was exposed. A mezzanine area was built within the volume of the synagogue.

The building now consists of 113 square metres of shopfront at street level, 287 square metres of space within the synagogue and the rear additions and 78 square metres of mezzanine floor.

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

²² Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia.* 1984

²³ Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia.* 1984 p4

²⁴ Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia.* 1984

²⁵ Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia.* 1984 p4

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

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

The former Fremantle Synagogue has some aesthetic value being a typical example of the gold boom architecture of Fremantle. The modest building, in the Federation Romanesque style, is well proportioned and has a pleasantly scaled interior space. The tuck pointed red brick and stucco bandwork and mouldings reflects design elements of other contemporary buildings in the southern end of Fremantle, even though the rendering of some walls has diminished the impact.

The building is an important component in a group of loosely spaced, contemporary buildings of considerable townscape importance which together define the southern edge of Fremantle's West End, including the Fremantle Markets, Scots Church, the Victoria Pavilion and Fremantle Technical College. They comprise an important transitional zone between the West End and the more dispersed southern residential area of Fremantle.

2. HISTORIC VALUE

The Fremantle Synagogue has considerable historic significance. It was the first Jewish synagogue constructed in Western Australia and has a strong association with the prominent Jewish community leaders and merchants, who were responsible for much of the civic and commercial development in Fremantle during the gold rush period.

Later additions and alterations to the former synagogue demonstrate social and commercial changes in the Fremantle community .

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The former synagogue is highly valued by members of the Jewish community of Perth as the place of worship of the first Jewish congregation in Western Australia.

5. RARITY

Although the building has not been used as a synagogue for many years it has a scarcity value as a turn of the century purpose built synagogue in Western Australia. (All other synagogues in Western Australia are post 1945.)

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The building is representative of the work of prominent architectural firm , Oldham and Eales, during the gold rush period.

CONDITION

Prior to restoration in 1985-87, the condition of the building was described as fair to reasonable.²⁶ Subsequent restoration and adaptation has been in sympathy with the original character of the building. The building continues to be maintained and is in sound condition

INTEGRITY

The building's use as a synagogue was short lived, less than ten years, and for most of its existence the building has been used for commercial rather than religious purposes. However, the building retains a reasonable degree of integrity.

AUTHENTICITY

The building is substantially intact and retains a reasonable degree of authenticity.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Fremantle Synagogue has cultural significance for the following:

it is the first synagogue built in Western Australia

it is closely associated with Jewish community leaders and merchants in Fremantle at the turn of the century.

it is an important component in a group of loosely spaced, contemporary buildings of considerable townscape importance, which define the south west boundary of Fremantle's West End precinct.

its subsequent alteration and uses demonstrates the change and continuity of community development over time in the use of buildings, which is characteristic of Fremantle's development as a merchant city.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 20/11/1992

Permanent Entry 16/11/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

²⁶ Molyneux, I. *An Architectural Evaluation for the Western Australian Heritage Committee: Former Synagogue, Fremantle, Western Australia*. 1984 p5

11. References

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