



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

## Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 0861
2. **Name.** Evan Davies Building (Former Literary Institute) (1899)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry.**

The Evan Davies Building and the land on which it stands, being Fremantle Town Lot 871, comprised in Certificate of Title 1118/562.
4. **Local Government Area.** City of Fremantle
5. **Location.** 13 South Terrace, Fremantle
6. **Owner.** City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

### DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The Literary Institute in Fremantle was founded in 1868 through an amalgamation of the Working Man's Association and the Mechanics Institute, private institutions formed to encourage debate and dissemination of ideas and knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The Literary Institute was housed in a number of alternate locations until the present building was erected in 1899.<sup>2</sup> Fremantle prospered and grew as a result of the gold rush period (1890 -1910), and a substantial number of new buildings were constructed.

The Literary Institute, a two storey building was constructed in 1899 to the design of Wilkinson, Smith and Wilson architects, the result of a design competition. Built by L. Burness for a sum of £1,528, it was praised at the time of completion as being "a credit to the architects Messrs. Wilkinson, Smith and Wilson."<sup>3</sup>

When opened in 1899 by the Mayor of Fremantle, Elias Solomon, the building included two shops, the main hall, attached ante-room and public entrance on the ground floor, and the main feature of the building, the rooms of the Literary Institute, on the upper floor.

The building continued to be used by the Literary Institute until 1949, when it was bought by the City of Fremantle and used to house the Fremantle City Council Library. The building was renamed the Evan Davies Civic Library, in

<sup>1</sup> The Victoria Public Library, built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, had grown from similar beginnings and was used for similar purposes in Perth.

<sup>2</sup> Kerr, W. *Architecture in Fremantle (1875-1915)* quoted in McK. Campbell, R, *The Evan Davies Building: A Report on its Condition and Future* (Fremantle City Council, July 1975) p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *West Australian* 17/3/1899 quoted in McK. Campbell, R, *ibid*.

honour of , and has been popularly known as the Evan Davies Building ever since. Most of the ground floor was leased to a bank. Public meetings continued to be held in the building, thus following the earlier tradition. For example, the Harbour Theatre group was formed at a public meeting held in the Evan Davies Building in 1963<sup>4</sup>The council library was relocated to the Council Offices, following completion of the extension to the Fremantle Town Hall, and the Harbour Theatre has occupied the upper floor of the Evan Davies Building since 1966. An amateur drama group and the only such group in Fremantle, the Harbour Theatre plays an important part in the cultural activity of the city. "The Harbour Theatre is still playing to packed houses in inadequate conditions on the first floor of the old building and their cultural value to the City is beyond doubt."<sup>5</sup> Its audience includes the general public, benefit performances, senior citizens and special programs for schools.

Due to a general curtailment of banking services in the 1990s, the bank vacated the ground floor of the Evan Davies Building in October 1993. (*Fremantle City Council has recently advertised for a new tenant.*)

### PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The building is sited on the south west corner of South Terrace and Collie Streets. It is in close proximity to Fremantle Markets, Freemasons Hotel, Kings Theatre, Manning's Buildings, Luisinis, and the Newcastle Club Hotel; all buildings constructed during the gold boom period.

The accommodation provided in the building, at the time of opening, was described as follows: "The public hall is recessed from the street with a portico in front. The dimensions of the hall are 40 feet by 20 feet with a raised platform at the back 13 feet 6 inches deep and the walls are decorated with dado and stencilling work. The entrance to the Library is on the right hand side of the hall, with a five foot passage to the staircase. The stairway is constructed of jarrah with turned balusters. On the upper storey there is the Library (23 feet 9 inches by 24 feet), the Librarians quarters, a smoke and a chess room (19 feet 6 inches by 21 feet 9 inches), a public reading room (27 feet by 45 feet) with ample light and ventilation, and a committee room (15 feet by 21 feet 9 inches)."<sup>6</sup>Built of brick, stucco, timber and galvanised iron, the Evan Davies Building is in the Federation academic classical style, with well detailed features.<sup>7</sup> The front elevation is completed in a classical manner with Ionic columns in the centre of the main facade carrying a pediment with the tympanum, enriched with foliage. A similar feature is used at the junction of the South Terrace and Collie Street frontages. On the ground floor there are heavy square columns with imitation stonework in cement stucco. An arched loggia indicates the principal entry to the hall, while arched opening indicate the entries to the two shops. On the upper floor doric pilasters are used to divide the circular headed windows, which have impost running between them to carry the archivolt.

When first built there was a verandah extending from the building over the footpath on the two street elevations. Signage reading "Literary Institute" was attached across the building, below the pediment. Later photographs show the

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<sup>4</sup> McK. Campbell, R. *op.cit.*, Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid* , p.6.

<sup>6</sup> *West Australian* , 17/3/1899

<sup>7</sup> Apperly, R *et.al.* *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles* . (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1989) pp.52-55.

subsequent construction of a first floor verandah, with timber ornamentation to emphasise the South Terrace entrance.<sup>8</sup> A large sign proclaiming "Fremantle Literary Institute" was attached to the verandah at the corner to Collie Street, and projecting beyond. This verandah and signage has now been removed, although the doorway, cut in to service first floor verandah, remains. In later years, the words "Evan Davies Civic Library" were mounted above the ground floor arched loggia, but these have since been removed.

## **ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

### **1. AESTHETIC VALUE**

The Evan Davies Building is a well-balanced and imposing civic building, in the Federation Academic Classical style. The recessed portico and pediment provide a strong visual focus to the ground floor entry.

The building defines the corner of South Terrace and Collie Streets. In itself, the Evan Davies Building is somewhat isolated, but in relationship to the Fremantle Markets, Freemasons Hotel, Kings Theatre, Manning's Buildings, Luisinis, and the Newcastle Club Hotel it is part of a suite of buildings that ably demonstrate the gold boom architecture for which Fremantle is renowned. Each of these buildings contribute a streetscape element, the loss of which would be detrimental to the scale and ambience of South Terrace.

### **2. HISTORIC VALUE**

The building is representative of ebullient architecture that was common in Fremantle, during the gold boom. As such it demonstrates the increasing prosperity and sophistication of Fremantle, and Western Australia, at the turn of the century.

The purpose of the Literary Institute and its change in use over time reflects changes in educational standards and community expectations: from a private organisation established for self improvement to that of a public body demonstrates the responsibility taken by local government for the provision of educational support services to the community.

### **3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

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### **4. SOCIAL VALUE**

In its role as a Literary Institute, then Council Library, and, currently, a community theatre the Evan Davies building has social value as a focal point for a variety of educational, cultural and social activities undertaken by the citizens of Fremantle.

As a theatrical performance site, the Evan Davies Building has introduced a generation of Fremantle citizens to live theatre - a tradition which has been

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<sup>8</sup> from photographs. McK. Campbell, R., *The Evan Davies Building: A Report on its Condition and Future* (Fremantle City Council, July 1975) p1a, p.2a.

continued in recent times with the formation of a number of other theatre companies in Fremantle.<sup>9</sup>

## **5. RARITY**

## **6. REPRESENTATIVENESS**

The Evan Davies Building, the former Literary Institute, is representative of a style of civic building, built by private interests to support community activity; a role now largely undertaken by the public sector through local and State government.

## **INTEGRITY**

The building continues to be used for purposes similar to that for which it was built, and therefore it is a high degree of integrity.

## **CONDITION**

Some internal walls on the ground floor have been altered to accommodate the bank, and a stud wall has been built on the upper, however the principal building fabric remains substantially intact. The removal of the surrounding upper balcony has slightly diminished the appearance of the building. (The original single storey verandah best displayed the overall design of the building.)

A preliminary survey, undertaken in 1975, indicated that building as a whole was structurally sound, although there was evidence of damp penetration, some rising damp, cracking of plaster and some structural shifting in the centre of the building.<sup>10</sup>

## **AUTHENTICITY**

With only minor alterations to the building over the years, the Evan Davies Building retains a high degree of authenticity.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Evan Davies Building, formerly the Literary Institute, has architectural significance for the quality of its design and style. The building makes a strong contribution to the South Terrace streetscape.

In its relationship with neighbouring buildings, the Evan Davies Building demonstrates the confident character of the gold boom architecture for which Fremantle is renown.

The building has historic and social significance as a demonstration of the shift in responsibility for educational and cultural activities; as its activities altered from being privately sponsored to being the responsibility of (local and state) government.

## **8. Register of Heritage Places**

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<sup>9</sup> eg. Deckchair Theatre Company, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre.

<sup>10</sup> See Engineers Report (Appendix B) in McK. Campbell, R, *op.cit.*, for more details.

Interim entry            20/11/1992  
Permanent Entry        29/10/1993

**9. Conservation Order**

**10. Heritage Agreement**

**11 References**

Apperly, R, et al. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1989)

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet

McK. Campbell, R, *The Evan Davies Building: A Report on its Condition and Future* (Fremantle City Council, July 1975)

National Trust Assessment Exposition