



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

Southern Cross Post Office exhibits aesthetic characteristics of vernacular architecture in its simple and conservative design, and in its use of materials and simple building techniques. (Criterion 1.1)

Southern Cross Post Office makes an important contribution to the unity of the streetscape of Antares and Achernar Streets. Together with the adjoining *Warden's Court* it is one of a number of important civic structures in a visually unified precinct. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Southern Cross Post Office is of historic value, with the adjoining *Warden's Court* for its direct associations with the development phase of gold mining and rural development in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Southern Cross Post Office is an example of unusual and innovative use of gauged and stripped gimlet rafter in the roof construction of a civic building. (Criterion 3.3)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Southern Cross Post Office is highly valued by the community as a communications centre and a meeting place relative to the transference of the mail, and is of importance in generating a physical and social link with the development of a rural and mining community. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Southern Cross Post Office is a rare example of Victorian Georgian style architecture, which at the time of construction, had generally given way to Federation style. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Southern Cross Post Office contains the principal characteristics of late Victorian Georgian style of architecture in Western Australia. (Criterion 6.1)

Southern Cross Post Office is representative of an early post office and quarters adapted with development in communications and of the associated rural and mining community. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Southern Cross Post Office, being built on reactive soil, is subject to differential movement in the clay soil resulting from alternate wetting and drying out. Openings in walls have occurred which have been repaired and have re-appeared. Severe and hairline cracks have occurred to some walls and ceilings to the residence, caused through aging and have recently opened due to the effects of blasting at nearby mines.

Overall, *Southern Cross Post Office* has been well maintained, and is considered to be in sound condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The effect of changes to the exterior surfaces is minimal. Changes to the interior are greater; however, while undesirable, they have not diminished the integrity of the place and could be easily reinstated. Overall, *Southern Cross Post Office* retains a moderate degree of integrity. The reinstatement could include the original counter, gutters, picket fence, timber ceiling to the mail room and the restoration to the interior of the residence.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Some alteration and replacement of building fabric has occurred over the years; however, the place is substantially intact and there is sufficient original fabric to the interior of the residence to reinstate that which was demolished. The addition of 1929, is considered harmonious and does not diminish the authenticity of the place. *Southern Cross Post Office* therefore retains a moderate degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

In 1864, small expeditions examined the country to the east of Northam and York, two of which extended as far as Southern Cross. Pessimistic reports as to the suitability of the land for grazing ensued, suggesting the country comprised small patches of grassland surrounded by whitegum with a profusion of Box Poison. Surface water was scarce, comprising a chain of salt lakes.¹

Around 1865, Mr Hunt and a team cut an axe track from York through Youndegin, Kellerberrin, Merredin to the Gnarlbine Rocks area, a short distance south west of Coolgardie. Some wells were sunk on the way. The track cut is the general line of the main road, the overland telegraph line, the pipeline and the former narrow gauge railway.²

In 1887, Mr Glass of Mugakine (about 160 km east of Newcastle [Toodyay]) found a large speck of gold while digging a tank. An expedition mounted under the leadership of Mr Colreavy explored unsuccessfully eastwards over a distance of 320 km towards Yilgarn Hills.

About the same time a number of other parties found reefs of gold from Eenuin (Anstey, Payne and Greaves) to the north and Parker's Range (Parker) further south. Colreavy returned on his own account and found a reef at Golden Valley. A minor rush followed, Riseley representing the Phoenix Company finding reefs at Southern Cross. Whilst travelling at night he used the Southern Cross to guide them.³

The major problem to be overcome was the lack of water.⁴

On October 1, 1888, the goldfield was proclaimed. Mr A F Thompson was appointed Warden, Mr J M Finnerty was appointed soon after.⁵

Little development ensued until the following year, most mining activity centred around Southern Cross. True lodes carrying rich quartz were found and condensers for supplying fresh water were erected, stores were set up.⁶

"As an instance of the primitive conditions prevailing it may be mentioned that the court-house was a bush structure and that the Warden dispensed justice while sitting on a gin case, a candle-box being provided for his clerk."⁷

From July 1888, mail was carried by extending the extant mail contract to Mooranoppin to Golden Valley at fortnightly intervals by a mounted policeman. A post office was opened at Golden Valley north of Southern Cross on a townsite named Knutsford on 24 July, 1888. The volume of mail increased rapidly, and by the end of the year it was necessary to provide a horse and cart contract service at weekly intervals. Gold was found in greater

¹ Leake, Bruce, Wyborn, *Reminiscences 1860-C1910*, 1961.

² *ibid.*

³ Battye, J., S., *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, Volume 1.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

quantity at Southern Cross, inciting many to move there. In January 1890, the post office at Golden Valley was moved to Southern Cross. The *Southern Cross Post Office* became a post and telegraph office in February, 1892.⁸

In 1893, the York-Southern Cross mail service was described as "York-Southern Cross, Parkers Range and Golden Valley via Mabbelling, Youndegin and Mooranoppin" and in 1894 as "York to Southern Cross, Doodlakine, Burracoppin, Milligan and Mooranoppin". All were carried out at weekly intervals and by cart, until the Eastern Goldfields Railway was built.⁹

A Post Office Publication issued in 1898, states that "Southern Cross was at one time the terminus of the Railway to the Eastern Goldfields and is connected with Perth by Telegraph and by a daily mail. It has a population of 650 males and 350 females."¹⁰

In 1892, the Telegraph Line from Perth via York reached Southern Cross, and a Posts & Telegraphs Office opened there on the 4th February.¹¹

"The officer in charge was so zealous about his job that finding no building ready for him he set up his apparatus in the middle of the street to send and receive messages. Various citizens erected temporary protection for him against wind and weather until more permanent quarters were found."¹²

In 1962, the Commonwealth of Australia held the title to Lot 765. On 3 March, 1982, a metric title was issued and cancelled on the same day extending to a depth of 12.19 metres and subject to certain mineral and other reservations was issued to Australian Postal Commission.

The tender for the building contract was let on 26 December, 1891, to J S Bruce for £400.¹³

The tender was registered as a Telegraph Station. A tender was let for Government Offices and Quarters on 20 June, 1892, until 20 April, 1893 for £5,306.¹⁴ Tender for repairs to the post office was let to G J Johnson on 19 May, 1903 until 13 June, 1903 for the sum of £101/12/6, and tenders for repairs and renovations to the post office was let to Murray and Wicks on 19 April 1905, until 19 May, 1905, for the sum of £54/10/.¹⁵

The site is located one block north of the Great Eastern Highway on the north west corner of the intersection of Antares and Achernar Streets and the site slopes down to the east towards Lake Polaris.

Southern Cross Post Office was constructed one year prior to the adjoining *Warden's Court*, now housing the Yilgarn History Museum. *Warden's Court*, shares a common wall with the residence of the *Southern Cross Post Office*. Prior to the construction of the *Warden's Court*, the Warden, E A F Compton, acted as Postmaster. The Telegraph line preceded the construction of the post

⁸ Notes supplied by the Postmaster from Post Office records.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Bursill, Harry Oliver, *Souvenir of the Postal Telegraph and Telephone of Western Australia*, Rare Books, Battye Library.

¹¹ *Yilgarn Citizen*, No. 46, 16 February, 1962.

¹² Wilson, H., H., *Westward Gold*.

¹³ PWD Contract Book, Volume 1.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

office, and the telegraphist had no accommodation at the outset until some temporary arrangement was made.

Southern Cross Post Office was designed by George Temple Poole, in Victorian Georgian style.¹⁶ The style had diminished in influence a decade previously and this application would have been seen as conservative, yet practical. The design is similar in character and detail (but not in plan form) to other post offices of outback mining towns, for example, at Norseman and Leonora; simple forms, locally available materials and easy to build.

In 1929, *Southern Cross Post Office* underwent minor alterations and extension of the mail room to the width of the existing verandah, and extensions comprising of 2 sleepouts, a bathroom and verandah to the rear of the living quarters. In 1950, extensions continued in the addition of a toilet.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Southern Cross Post Office is a single storey building designed by George Temple Poole and built by J S Bruce. The building was constructed in 1891-92, in brickwork with timber floors and roof sheeting of corrugated iron.

Southern Cross Post Office has bonded face brick outer width walling with rendered plinths to window sill height and rendered architraves to reveals of openings of a leaf thickness with pressed brick with cut and struck joint quoins. It is likely that the outer leaf of the building to plinth height is of local stone. External lower cavity ventilators are woven heavy gauge wire gauze with pressed metal ventilators to the upper cavity in a f type pattern.

Except for the post office section, the internal walls and ceilings are lathe and plaster. Roof extension is of gimlet poles with dressed beams and posts to verandahs only.

Mrs Forrester from the Yilgarn History Museum advises that the face brick came from the *Maori Lass Mine* and *New Zealand Gully Dam*, and that the bricks were sun dried clay with mud bonding. All of the external masonry, including the render, has been painted. In one location on the external wall of the quarters, the clay matrix of a callow brick was exposed revealing a pink clay base with white quartz like chips.

Windows are flyscreened casements with hopper windows over, having flat arched heads formed with soldier bricks. The kitchen windows and some doors are not from the original construction. Roofing is galvanised corrugated iron, the verandah is pitched at 20°, the main roof being steeper. The roof framing consists of 100 mm diameter gimlet rafters (bush timber) with bark removed. Verandah posts are stop chamfered spread gallow brackets to the beam. Verandah floors are granolithic.

The residence is located to the northern end of the building and consisted of 3 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. The roof line extends to form a verandah to the south and east elevations.

The internal ceilings have been replaced, or subceiled below the original lathe and plaster throughout, with plasterboard. With the exception of some

¹⁶ Apperly, A., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson, 1989, pp. 40-45.

internal doors, little original fabric remains. The rear verandah, although heavily painted, reveals some stonework between brick quoins in the early plinth.

The ceiling to the mail room of the *Southern Cross Post Office* is jarrah boarded and in good condition, but subsequently sheeted over with painted striated fibre board set in beads. Other than the walls, little remains of the original fabric. The footprint of earlier passage-mail room subdivision is evident on the ceiling.

In 1929, the alterations and additions included, the blocking of the original entrance, and providing two new entrances; the mail room was extended and the passage to rear was demolished; fireplaces were removed; chimneys and a section of wall were removed, and new truss beams were installed over including new receivers. The mail room was extended eastwards by the width of the existing verandah, providing a new beam and timber lining; plinths and masonry other than face brick quoins and reveals were rendered to the rear verandah of the residence. Additions of 2 sleepouts, a bathroom and verandah were also made to the rear of the residence between the laundry and amenities room.

The receivers date from this period, and the remnant jarrah cabinet whilst crude, remains intact except for a section cut away from the left hand side to house the post boxes.

Aluminium foil faced insulation sits under the roof, with existing beams over the new openings, with recent air conditioning ductwork and tongued and grooved jarrah boarded ceiling.

Subsequent works included, the removal and replacement of the picket fence, the signage was altered, and the telephone booth has been relocated and replaced.

Internally the residence has been totally renovated except as noted previously.

Southern Cross Post Office retains some joinery partitions and other joinery, the main counter has been replaced, and it would be achievable to reinstate the remainder. The striated subceiling conceals the original wide boarded ceiling which appears extensive. Should the striated material be removed to reveal the original boarding, some patching may be needed where cut outs for services have been made.

Also evident is a system of ties installed east to west at plate height in the gable roofed section at the southern end of the *Southern Cross Post Office*, suggesting excessive wall movement in the past. This same damage is evident in the adjoining *Warden's Court*, the kitchen of the residence and the granolithic of the back verandah. Considerable movement cracking was noted on the west and south wall of the mail room.

13.3 REFERENCES

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