



## 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

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* has landmark value. Due to the series of vistas that have been created by the new roundabout and the re-direction of traffic down Brook Street that has formed part of East Perth's redevelopment, the place is clearly visible and forms a vista end to Bennett Street. (Criterion 1.3)

#### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Warehouse A of *Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* bears the factory name on the Saunders Street facade. The name is a tangible reminder of the Boans retail chain which was a major contributor to retailing in Western Australia from 1900 onwards, and which no longer exists. (Criterion 2.1)

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* is evidence of the development and change that has occurred within the industrial neighbourhood of East Perth (Criterion 2.2)

#### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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#### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* demonstrates the diversity of the Boans retail chain which was the major domestic provisioner in Western Australia from 1900 and, as a supplier of a range of locally produced goods, contributed to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.1)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* is the last remaining landmark in East Perth that indicates the history of an industrial area. The Gas Works, sewerage treatment works and brickyards no longer exist. (Criterion 5.1)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* is representative of a time when East Perth was an industrial neighbourhood. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* is generally in good condition in some parts and in very poor condition in others. For a detailed report on the place see Bruechle Gilchrist and Evans Pty Ltd, 'Boans Warehouse Initial Structural Assessment' (for East Perth Redevelopment Authority, May 1994).

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* retains a moderate degree of integrity.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* retains a high degree of authenticity.

## 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Nineteenth Century cottage industries and residences once dominated Crown land at East Perth.<sup>1</sup> From 1829, a cemetery existed on Cemetery Hill, and there were market gardens on the river flats. An abattoir (c. 1852), Cook's Mill (mid 1850s), a foundry, timber yards and brickyards at Claise Brook also existed (four brickyards were in operation by 1890). Flour milling, factories, bottling works and small breweries were also in existence. Residential support services were introduced to the area including, schools, shops and churches and by the 1890s, gas works were developed.<sup>2</sup>

In 1916, the East Perth Power Station was commissioned on the river foreshore, and, in 1928, a PWD Depot was set up which operated until the early 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the residential area of East Perth was eventually replaced with industry and trade and the remaining housing stock deteriorated.<sup>4</sup>

Boans Limited was established, in 1896, in Wellington Street, Perth, as a general retail store. J. S. Battye explains that when the Boans Wellington Street store was extended through to Murray Street, in 1912, furniture was one of the new departments to be added to the Boans emporium. The furniture department included not only imported furniture but also furniture made by Boans at its factory.<sup>5</sup>

The date of construction of *Boans furniture factory (fmr)* in East Perth is difficult to verify; however, it is believed to at least have been constructed prior to 1925.<sup>6</sup> In an oral history interview, Edwin Benness, Boans' Managing Director 1970-78 reflects:

It was a fairly old building when I started in '32 and, casting my memory back, I think it probably was established in the first few years in the 1900s. I would have assessed that the building would have been at least twenty years old, if not a little older, when I first went down there.<sup>7</sup>

If this is correct it may have been built to accommodate stock for the enlarged retail premises.

*Boans furniture factory (fmr)* produced bedroom furniture, including mattresses, dining and kitchen furniture. There was also a cane-ware and upholstery section. The furniture was made according to designs created by

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<sup>1</sup> Bodycoat, R., 'East Perth Heritage Study' V1, (for the East Perth Redevelopment Authority, August 1993) p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Battye gives the location of this factory as West Perth.

<sup>6</sup> See Heritage Council file P3515 for historic photographs of the factory and its staff.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Benness, Oral History Interview: OH2546/1, 1993/94, p.4. This interview was conducted by the Battye Library Oral History Unit for the East Perth Redevelopment Authority. Benness worked for Boans from 1932 to 1978, his last 8 years as Managing Director and Chairman.

the Boans' factory designers, who were not only kept abreast of the latest international trends but of the specific demands from store customers.<sup>8</sup>

The factory had a brick frontage to Saunders Street, and a corrugated iron roof. Skylights provided light, although if conditions were dull artificial light was used. Ventilation did not rely on air-conditioning or heating services, and dust extraction units removed wood dust from the machines. The furniture factory had its own lunch room. Some recreational facilities were available such as table tennis and other tables for draughts and cards.<sup>9</sup>

By the mid 1930s, the East Perth factory consisted of a furniture factory (which fronted Saunders Street), and a bulk store and dispatch section (that both fronted Brown Street). There were about 30 to 40 vehicles operating from the dispatch area and the repairs and maintenance of these vehicles were carried out by the mechanics in the motor division section at the factory.<sup>10</sup>

After World War II, the bakehouse, on the fourth floor of the Boans City store, moved to the East Perth factory - the expansion into suburban areas increased the demands on the bakehouse. The bakehouse was on the western side of the bulk store with the entrance from Brown Street. There was also, by this time, a butchery, which operated alongside the bakery, where carcasses were cut and prepared for delivery. All Boans' smallgoods and sausages were made in the butchery. When television was introduced to Western Australia (c. 1959), Boans purchased more land facing Glyde Street and built another factory to house television assembly, as well as radio and electrical goods.<sup>11</sup>

In the late 1960s or early 1970s, the furniture factory began to change its operations. The management of Boans realised that with changing and varied tastes in furniture, it would be easier and more profitable to buy high quality furniture 'from specialist furniture-makers in the State, or in the other States, and even some from overseas.'<sup>12</sup> The factory was then geared to produce all Boans' shop fittings such as cupboards and shelves.

Inevitably, the factory at East Perth became too small to serve all the necessary functions now required of it, especially with new mechanisation processes. As Boans was not able to expand its factory in East Perth, operations were gradually moved to the central distribution centre in Cannington. This move was completed by January 1976.<sup>13</sup>

Boans sold the East Perth property to the State Government (Main Roads), with 'Ross's Salvage' taking over the service station in Royal Street. Ross's Salvage eventually took over the showroom and the factory 'which consisted

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, Benness goes on to say that in 1935/36, Boans purchased almost all of the jarrah piling from the old wharf at Fremantle which had been pulled down. Much of the furniture to come out of the Boans factory at this time was made from this wood.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> The motor division was later moved to where Boans built their BP Service Station on Royal Streets, East Perth. Parking was made available to Boans' customers and a courtesy service was established between the East Perth station and the city store. See Benness, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

of all Boans' warehouse, the joiners' shop, the butchers' shop and most of the properties in East Perth of Boans.<sup>14</sup>

The Boans enterprise was later sold to Myer. *Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* in East Perth is the only building left in Western Australia carrying the Boans name.<sup>15</sup>

In May 1992, the property was transferred by Main Roads to the East Perth Redevelopment Authority who often leases the premises to arts, cultural or community groups as a venue for theatre, concerts, exhibitions and fashion parades.<sup>16</sup>

Through the establishment of the East Perth Redevelopment Authority and its statutory planning control, East Perth is experiencing a regeneration of residential areas, an upgrading of original natural resources including, Claise Brook, the Lagoon and the Swan River foreshore, and the removal of heavy industry.<sup>17</sup>

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Boans Furniture Factory (fmr)* is a bold structure which is utilitarian in character. The site is bounded by Brown, Glyde and Saunders Streets, East Perth.

Together with the vacated Electricity and Gas Depot No. 6 Sub-station, opposite on Glyde Street, the buildings form a group of typical industrial forms unified by the use of red clay brickwork.

The place is now a landmark in East Perth that forms a vista end to Bennett Street. Due to the newly created roundabout, and the re-direction of traffic down Brook Street, the place is clearly visible when entering East Perth from a southerly and easterly direction.

The former factory comprises a series of joined warehouses - a two-storey warehouse to the southern bay (Warehouse A) and five single-storey bays running north (Warehouse B). Built of load-bearing masonry walls to the north, south and east elevations, that are buttressed at regular centres with heavy brick piers. The end walls, of the west elevation, are timber framed and clad with corrugated, galvanised iron.

The gabled roofs are of timber trussed construction, supported on timber posts, steep pitched and clad with corrugated iron with ridge ventilators. The gable ends feature louvred metal vents. The exterior features concrete lintels and sills. The Saunders Street elevation bears the factory name.

The two-storey bay is believed to be the oldest constructed warehouse of the series.<sup>18</sup> Originally built as a single-storey, differences in brickwork and

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<sup>14</sup> Dodd, Harold William, Oral History Interview: OH 2546/8, 1994, p. 26. This interview was conducted by the Battye Library Oral History Unit for the East Perth Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>15</sup> *The Easterly*, 4 December 1994, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Bodycoat, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Seeber Architect, 'The City Northern Bypass and The Old Boan's (sic) Warehouses' (A report for Main Roads Western Australia, March 1986), p. 3.

laying pattern suggest a second storey was added at a later date.<sup>19</sup> The second storey is believed to have been added in 1935, which introduced a steel column and beam structure and relocated the existing roof trusses to the upper level.<sup>20</sup>

According to Bernard Seeber Architects, original timber windows were also relocated to the upper storey and replaced with the existing steel framed windows with small panes.<sup>21</sup>

Floors are suspended timber throughout with the exception of the concrete floor at the loading bay off Saunders street. An opening in the upper floor, over the loading bay, contains a lifting device connected to a gantry - a moveable pulley system. The gantry extends over the opening, to the loading bay, to areas within the warehouse and to the end walls for dispatching to the outside lane. A timber trolley path, on the lower level, also extends from the loading bay to areas within the warehouse.

Concrete plates (probably used to support some structure over) with holding down bolts are located within the timber floor.

The interior also comprises two timber staircases and remnant framing for timber partitions, especially to the office, adjacent to the loading bay.

In the newer section, there are four bays of pitched roofs that run east west. The roof is constructed of a column and beam structure that supports a timber, triangular truss. Three sections of the pitched roof have box gutters between them. Under one box gutter, parallel chord and timber trusses, which also act as springing points for the triangular roof trusses, have been constructed. Under the other is a steel structure. The central bay contains a mezzanine with a concrete floor on a steel structure. Recently appointed toilets and staff rooms are under.

The interior features vertical steel posts embedded into the floor for stacking. The floors are suspended timber throughout with the exception of a concrete floor to the loading bay off Glyde Street.

Since 1994, general maintenance on the former factory has been undertaken by the East Perth Redevelopment Authority. Works have included replacement of timber flooring and roof sheeting, and repairs to roof plumbing.

The condition of the place is generally sound; however, the timber floors are in poor to fair condition and many of the timber posts have been termite infested. Due to heavy wear on the timber floors, much of the flooring needs replacing. The wall framing on the west elevation needs repair and the cladding material replaced. Some parallel chord trusses supporting the roof trusses, and some timber posts have failed. Various props have been put in place to ensure the roof does not collapse. Some remedial works are required to the brick walls. The original two-storey, southern section has had original

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<sup>19</sup> See historic photograph BA 287/271 (n.d.). The photograph is believed to have been taken on or before 1925 and shows the southern warehouse without the upper storey.

<sup>20</sup> Seeber.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*,

corrugated galvanised iron sheeting replaced by a sheeting with a modern profile and is in fair condition. The remaining sheeting needs replacing.<sup>22</sup>

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Bruechle Gilchrist and Evans Pty Ltd, 'Boans Warehouse Initial Structural Assessment' (for East Perth Redevelopment Authority, May 1994).

Bernard Seeber Architect, 'The City Northern Bypass and The Old Boan's (sic) Warehouses' (A report for Main Roads, Western Australia, March 1986).

Bodycoat, R., 'East Perth Heritage Study' V1, (for the East Perth Redevelopment Authority, August 1993).

East Perth Development Authority, 'East Perth Redevelopment Scheme, Planning Policies', December 1992.

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed assessment on the condition of the place, see Bruechle Gilchrist and Evans Pty Ltd, 'Boans Warehouse Initial Structural Assessment' (for East Perth Redevelopment Authority, May 1994).