



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

The Treasury group began as disparate buildings on the western and eastern boundaries of the site, conceived as part of an overall plan in a simple Victorian Georgian style by Jewell (1874-1878). The General Post Office was introduced as a major central linking element in the Victorian Second Empire style to designs by Poole (1889) and the existing east and west wings were allowed to remain expressions of their time until 1898 when the GPO was given its second floor and the balance shifted giving emphasis to the GPO. Still the three elements remained expressions of their time and reflected the endeavours of their respective creators. Between 1902 and 1904 both east and west wings of the Treasury building received their second floors. The roofscapes were unified and Jewell's elevation treatments were revisited and given the stucco dressings, quoins and casements that were characteristic of Poole's GPO, though Jewell's Victorian Georgian proportions were retained. The differences in the brick colours in relation to the various construction campaigns remain a testament to the earlier appearance of the east and west wings prior to their revision.

The Lands Department (Lands and Surveys) built in 1893, also to designs by Poole, continued the Victorian Second Empire style for the Cathedral Avenue extension of the Government Offices. The detailing of the building while still within the stylistic expression of the Treasury group, chose a different series of architectural devices, including the deep and imposing cantilevered balcony, pavilion ends and an eccentrically located entry.

The Titles Office was completed in 1897 to designs by Poole and this was the tallest and most exuberant of the group of buildings in terms of the modeling of the wall planes and the boldness of the treatments. This is a landmark building which is unique with its free melding of classical elements. These elements include a huge low arched entrance, the massive two-storey

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter A *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1989.

colonnaded, cantilevered balconies on enriched brackets similar to the Lands Department (Lands and Surveys) building beside it. Above the balconies is an arcade, then an entablature with a wide overhanging eaves supported on consoles. The work is a powerful monumental design without peer in Western Australia.

Remarkably, the three elements were brought together into a harmonious whole of great aesthetic importance, as well as creating a piece of architectural archaeology for future generations to ponder. The place is therefore held in high regard by the community in general and by design related professions such as architecture, as possessing a very high degree of aesthetic value. (Criterion 1.1)

Jewell's initial vision strongly influenced much of what was to follow on the Treasury Building site. His first three campaigns established the eastern and western extremities of the development and set in place the materials palette for the remainder to the Treasury complex and this palette followed on from his previous Perth Town Hall. It also influenced Poole's palette in the buildings that followed; the Lands Department and Titles Office. Each successive building and campaigns to each of the buildings until around 1923 maintained the highest standards of design set by Jewell and Poole in particular.

The place was out of step with stylistic developments elsewhere in Australia, but were nevertheless of a high order. Poole's freehand sketches indicate an even richer design than those later developed into contract drawings. The remaining physical evidence and the enormous amount of documentary evidence point to a series of well designed campaigns, often exhaustively detailed, down to desks and shelves.

Each campaign of each building reflects the considerable skills of successive public architects and those who assisted them. Each building is skillfully designed as an entity and the manner in which the separate elements interrelate is quite exceptional.

The individual components of the place are important for their artistic achievement and the group as a whole is a demonstration of the particular design skills of their chief creators, in particular Richard R. Jewell and George T. Poole, supported by John Grainger and Hillson Beasley from 1897 until 1904. (Criterion 1.2)

The Cathedral Precinct, of which the place contains a number of important structures, collectively act as part of a Perth landmark, within the context of a more widely recognized and loosely defined heritage precinct. The key elements of this landmark is the place itself, the Perth Town Hall, St. George's Cathedral, The Burt Memorial Hall, the Deanery and across Pier Street, St. Andrews Church. This notion of the landmark is partly to do with the key location of the group of places, their scale, the nature of the functions they serve or have served and also the visual impact of the place as a whole.

The buildings in the immediate precinct are either civic and ecclesiastical in their uses. The designs of each were intended to make a public statement.

The whole group forms a late nineteenth century landmark within a larger cultural heritage precinct that contained elements dating from the first two

decades of the foundation of the Colony. By virtue of its location, scale and design, the place has been a landmark since the first campaigns of construction were completed. (Criterion 1.3)

The place is part of a significant cityscape that impacts on the St. George's Terrace, Barrack and Hay Street experiences and greatly contribute to the character of the City of Perth. It is the largest collection of buildings among a small number of substantial late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that remain in the centre of Perth. It provides present and, will provide, future generations with a sense of continuity with the City of Perth before the major changes of the 1960s. Together with St. George's Cathedral, the place is the defining element of the experience of the movement between the Supreme Court, Stirling Gardens and the transition to the commercial heart of the city on Hay Street. Each of the major components plays its own role in the landmark value of the place, but the collective effect is considerably more important in its impact on the urban townscape.

The place forms a historic precinct on its own account and is part of a wider historic precinct that is of enormous importance for its aesthetic character and is a townscape element of exceptional importance. (Criterion 1.4)

## **11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE**

The place is an important and integral part of the story of the development of the Colony and later the State's public service.

Perth was constituted as a City in 1856 and little happened on the site until a guard house was constructed in Barrack Street in 1861. In 1868, the course of history that lead to the present configuration of buildings began to be set with the commencement of the Perth Town Hall (1868-1870), the Legislative Council (1870-demolished) and also the commencement of the first of Jewell's campaigns in 1874. This was the completion of the northern section of the West Wing of the present Treasury Building.

Following the granting of Responsible Government in 1890, the Colony could raise loan funds for public works. The Public Works Department was properly established.

The rapid expansion of the Colony following the discovery of gold saw the need for still further accommodation and the Titles Office was built to designs by Poole and modified by Grainger in 1897.

Following the removal of the GPO to Forrest Place in 1923, the use of the place intensified and departments began to be located at other sites in order to meet demand. There was a rapid series of expansion campaigns to the place to accommodate growing civil service numbers. This involved the addition of new sections to existing buildings and even new storeys onto both Jewell's and Poole's treasury group. The story of the place is one of continual expansion and adaptation to meet growing or changing needs, reflecting a history of growth and change in the civil service from the 1860s to 1996, when the last of the occupied spaces was vacated. The list of Government departments which occupied parts of the Central Government Offices is long and includes almost all departments at one time or another. People from

many walks of life were brought into contact with one or more of the agencies that were located in this complex.

*Central Government Offices* therefore, demonstrate the continuum of development of the public service of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

The establishment and growth of the place is both a reflection of progress of the Colony and later State in general, together with the history and economic development of the State in particular. The beginnings of the development of the site and of the public service was slow, reflecting the struggle of the young Colony to establish itself on a sound basis in the first twenty years of its existence. Even the arrival of the Imperial convicts in 1850 did not have an immediate impact on the accommodations for the civil service. However, the completion of the Pensioner Barracks freed the place's site of its military encumbrance and opened the possibility for the establishment of government offices on the site. A substantial start could not be made immediately as the call on scarce Government resources and convict labor was great. The slow start and gradual progress throughout the first four stages of work reflect an economy that was growing steadily if unspectacularly. By the time of the gold discoveries in the Eastern Goldfields, the other colonies were experiencing economic recession. The interest created by the discovery of gold caused an influx of people from the other colonies and around the world. This sudden influx saw a growth in the demand for the survey of land and the issuing of titles. This was one of the fastest growing arms of Government and accommodation was provided for these functions in successive campaigns in 1893 and 1897 with the construction of the Lands Department and the Titles Office respectively. Following the completion of the Titles Office, the growth in the economy and the size of the public service was reflected in the additions to all the existing buildings, including the additional storeys to the whole of the Treasury group of buildings.

The place is a reflection of the development of the State and its civil service over the whole of the site's history following the establishment of the first barracks building on the site in the third year of the Colony's existence up to 1996. (Criterion 2.2)

The place is closely associated with an enormous list of individuals who played an important part in the history and development of the Colony and later the State of Western Australia. Some of the figures include:

Colonial Secretaries from Barlee 1855-1875 to Steere 1890, Colonial Treasurers from Lefroy 1856-77 to Elliot 1889, Surveyors General from Fraser 1870-1883, John Forrest 1883 to 1890 through to John Morgan 1968-84, Registrars General from James 1887 to Clifton 1898-1912, Superintendents of Public Works or Civil Engineers and Commissioners for Railways including Jewell (1854-84), Bird (1883-4), Poole (1885-97), Grainger (1897-2905), Beasley (1905-16), Hardwick (1917-27), Tait (1927-31 and Clare (1931-60), Mason (1882-1890). Directors of Public Works J. H. Thomas(1878-1884), John Arthur Wright, C. Y. O'Connor, 1891- 1902 Engineer in Chief, also Postmasters General from Sholl to Whysall, and Attorneys General, Inspectors General of Education, Politicians and State Premiers.

Clearly the place is associated with a rich and long list of individuals and departments who played a significant role in the development of the State and its administration. (Criterion 2.3)

The collective buildings and the individual pieces of design are of value for their artistic achievement. They were not so much breaking new ground as pushing the design of Government buildings in a highly individual direction when compared with other states in Australia. The treatment of the buildings, although now denuded of some of their detail, demonstrate a significant degree of excellence. Individual elements such as the interior of the postal hall, individual stair cases, the interior of the postal hall entry, the ironwork, sprung corrugated iron lost formwork vaulting are all of great artistic and technical importance in the context of the development of architecture in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.4)

### **11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

The place has had all the fittings and equipment removed with the exception of various security and fire doors, items of shelving and some items of sanitary ware. The kinds of things such as hoists, counters, screens and display cases that would have demonstrated modes of operation have all been removed so that the technical story that is told by the remaining evidence relates to the last few decades of use of the place and most of the equipment associated with the last years of operation has been removed.

The place does contain a rich variety of building materials and construction techniques that are indicative of the science of building through forty years or more of traditional construction that is associated with the more significant phases of development and early extensions of the site. (Criterion 3.1)

Much of the very early development of the place was comprehensively obliterated by successive campaigns of construction. There is likely to be almost no traces of prehistory on this much worked over site and little of the first structures that stood on the site from 1832-1870 which were gradually obliterated with each new phase of development. The remaining structures do offer the historical archaeologist a virtual museum of construction materials and techniques between 1874 and 1963 when the last major changes to the building took place. (Criterion 3.2)

Since all the technology associated with historic functions of the place has been removed and few physical items of evidence remain, there is little that can be said about the technical innovation of all that has been lost. There are a few areas of technical innovation which are worthy of mention and these relate to construction techniques.

There is no evidence of the original hydraulic lift and little evidence of the upgraded fireproofing of the basements with their steel fittings. There are however some fragments in a small number of basement rooms which are worthy of note as well as the general spaces. The first item of interest in the basement is the sprung corrugated iron lost formwork soffits. Though the technique is used elsewhere in the complex, its use in the basement is much earlier. Jewell employed the technique in the basement to the South West Wing of the Treasury and it is this building which probably made the first use of the technique in Western Australia. Poole used the technique in his

development of the GPO. It was used as a means of fireproofing and as a form of security in prison construction in a number of buildings that were built under Poole. It was used at the Victoria Public Library and Museum and in the ceilings off a number of holding cells attached to regional courts.

The use of cavity wall construction is believed to be one of the earliest applications in Western Australia and the in-cavity ventilation systems, use of damp proof courses and hydraulic lifts are also of technical interest.

The trusses used over the GPO postal hall were comparatively large span for their time and employed standard timber construction techniques using Oregon for its main timbers. The composite steel and timber trusses over the eastern courtyard is of some technical interest. Finally the steel reinforced concrete cantilevered concrete verandahs are also of some technical interest, the more so since 1996 when failures began to emerge and investigations were made into methods of rectifying the balcony failures. (Criterion 3.3)

#### 11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The South Wing of the place was completed as a grand civic statement just before the granting of Responsible Government for which the Colony had so long striven. The building symbolized that sense of arrival and even though the Parliament transferred to a new building in 1904, the public perception of the building remained of *Central Government Offices* as the place from which the business of State government was conducted in those areas that touched most people's lives. Together with the Lands Department and the Titles Office, it was the most important symbol of public service.

The place retained psychological significance to later generations as the symbol of an orderly existence. It was here, in the depression when all was not 'right with the world', that the public demonstrated – not at Parliament House as is common today. Indeed, it was for many a symbol of government as late as 1966 and for older members of the community will probably remain that way until the buildings are put to some new use.

The place stood for a way of life and values. These values have changed and successive governments have implemented programs to effect reductions in the size and areas of activity of the civil service. Values that underpinned the public service and old notions of the role of the civil service itself lost currency in post 1980 period and the significance of the buildings to the younger generation is probably more related to their appearance than their use. (Criterion 4.1)

The city block upon which the place is located was one of the earliest sites to acquire civic buildings commencing with the barracks in 1832. From this point onwards there was a steady if slow progression of development of civic buildings as previously indicated, until the major works were commenced by Jewell in 1874 with the northern section of the West Wing of the Treasury Building. This signaled a period of thirty years of development which saw the completion of all the main components of the place which constitute the public face of the buildings and which symbolized the services they accommodated. The public would not necessarily have been aware of the further developments that occurred up to 1963. These were essentially additions and alterations to the existing accommodation. By 1904, the basic

ingredients with which people are familiar were established and only the simplification of detail would have been of significant note. So in its existing format the place has been the symbol of government and government service in particular since 1904 and in various forms since 1874.

In association with the Perth Town Hall, McNess Royal Arcade, St. George's Cathedral, Burt Memorial Hall, the Deanery and St. Andrew's Church, Stirling Gardens, the Old Courthouse, Supreme Court and Supreme Court Gardens, Council House and Government House and the Weld Club, the place is part of a group which connects Western Australians with their past and contribute to Western Australian's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

Each capital city in Australia has a collection of public buildings that either serve or served similar functions to the place. The remarkable features of the place that sets it apart from equivalent buildings or complexes in other states is the collection of contiguous buildings in differing designs in the Victorian Second Empire and Federation Free Classical styles. Other states chose classically derived architectural forms of expression both for their civil and cultural institutions. This is an indication of Western Australia's freedom from the influence from the eastern colonies, despite the fact that many professional people such as Grainger and Beasley made their way to Western Australia via Victoria.<sup>1</sup>

The place could be said to be uncommon in the Australian context for its use of architectural styles that were not in use elsewhere in the country contemporaneously. (Criterion 5.1)

Clearly the place demonstrates a philosophy of architectural excellence for public buildings. It also demonstrate a planning approach in the context of the city where the profile of the government and its services was a proud tradition and its built symbols were respected. The internal planning was also reflective of a tradition of large public spaces to serve the public service functions, generous cellular offices for administrators and large open spaces where such tasks as drafting and storage took place.

With the passage of time and changes in technology, to the principles of space planning and in the structure of the civil service itself, together with the notion of minimization of the business of Government, the requirements of place in general has changed. The degree of public contact has been reduced, Government has in the main reduced its role to procurement and administration wherever possible and the need for specialized spaces has been reduced. The emphasis has instead changed to the flexible accommodation of the range of requirements in general commercial office spaces so that the Government leases rather than holds property in many instances and can respond to change at short notice. Further Government

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<sup>1</sup> Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1989.

administration has grown so large that concentration in a single complex is no longer practical and has not been a feature of Government Administration since the period following World War Two.

With this general shift in Government administration and practice, the kind of public service that the place represents has by and large passed, so that the place is a material and symbolic reminder of the traditional structure, geographical concentration and conduct of the public service and is representative of a process that now takes a different shape arising from a different political philosophy.

The place could be said to have achieved rarity arising from these shifts in practice and the commissioning of public architecture. (Criterion 5.2)

## **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

The place in its present form demonstrates the range and development of a large proportion of the State Government administration and services over the period 1874 to 1996 when the last functions were removed to alternative premises. It demonstrates the public building genre as it related to Western Australia and in particular the architectural pre-occupations of the authors of the various campaigns which were distinctive and set apart from their counterparts in the eastern colonies as has already been noted. (Criterion 6.1)

The principal components of the place were conceived over a forty year period at a time of increasing prosperity when Western Australia built some of its finest architecture and settings, together with the institutions that remain part of our present society, notwithstanding its being subject to continual change. The surviving buildings were built at a time when the Colony/State began to experience prosperity and expansion, with the consequent emerging need to expand its administration. The developments from 1893 represent the confidence of the Colony following the economic impact of the rich discoveries of gold in the eastern goldfields, together with improving agricultural output in a national context of a generally depressed economy. Its continual growth is representative of societies expectations of its government and public service. Its final abandonment for Government purposes in 1996 is reflective of changes in Government philosophy in Western Australia and of capitalist states in general in the last decade of the twentieth century. (Criterion 6.2)

## **12. 3 CONDITION**

The place was finally vacated in 1996 and little has been done toward its conservation and maintenance since this time. The fabric, though generally in fair to good condition, has a number of specific areas where conservation works are required as a matter of urgency. The main causes for concern are termite activity, damp penetration mainly in the basement areas and a small number of roof leaks and the structural failure of the balconies. The exteriors retain a high degree of authenticity between pavement and parapet levels. The roofscape has lost much of its detail, though it has retained a good deal of its authentic geometry, relative to the main periods of significance. It is likely that the roof tiles will need major attention within the next ten years.



Work is required to the west wall of the Titles Office, the north and east verandahs of the Titles Office and to arrest rainwater penetration generally in a small number of locations where these conditions are extremely poor. External joinery and decorative treatments are also in need of attention and there are service penetrations in various parts of the place that could now be sealed or re-used for alternative service arrangements. There are also instances of cracking in walls but none of these would seem to indicate any large scale structural defects, but rather series of unrelated local defects.

The interiors vary considerably in terms of condition, with most major deterioration occurring at the basement and roof levels. The authenticity of most internal spaces has been reduced by insensitive adaptations and additions, though there are several major spaces of great importance. Several areas in the complex basements are also of a high degree of authenticity and importance. The former postal hall is one of the most important internal spaces.

There is evidence of water penetration on the upper floor of the southern wing of the Treasury Building which is also in need of urgent attention. There are a number of locations at basement level and along the eastern wall of the eastern wing where damp penetration is causing deterioration of the fabric and finishes. While these occurrences are not putting the building in any immediate danger, their presence does pose a long term threat to the retention of the fabric.

#### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

At present the place retains its integrity, even without housing the original functions. Nothing has changed to confuse their interpretation and so the values are largely sustained. Future use is likely to include a change of use for the interiors and visual cues for the new uses will be required on the buildings elevations. The values related to traditional usage will then become diluted, though aesthetic, historic and scientific values will be retained. Aesthetic values are capable of being enhanced by the reinstatement of missing fabric, general conservation works and a proper maintenance programme. Continued use either by a Government department or a sympathetic alternative use will assist with the retention of its heritage values and the conservation of the place.

#### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

There is a high degree of authenticity in the exterior treatments of the place with the exception of some areas of the internal courtyard to the north of the main built up areas, the roof finishes and the entries to almost all elements. The main campaigns from 1874 to 1904 that give the place its external appearance are substantially intact. The major interior spaces have retained a relatively high degree of authenticity as have almost all the basement areas. Other areas such as office spaces have fared less well with the removal of fire places, the loss of fittings, insertion of suspended ceilings and floor finishes and the occasional obliteration of elements such as the entry to lobby and stair to both the West Wing of the Treasury Building and the Lands Department (Lands and Surveys). It is possible that some of the detail that may have been lost lies under the present finishes and there is evidence to support this notion

in the small number of areas where later finishes were capable of easy removal during the physical inspections that were done for the conservation plan.

### **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

Attached are key sections of the supporting evidence prepared by Considine and Griffiths Architects with Erickson and Taylor Historians: 'Central Government Offices Perth; Conservation Plan, August 1998' (prepared for Department of Contract and Management Services on behalf of Government Property Office).

The curtilage conforms with the study area as outlined at page xxxi of the Conservation Plan.

#### **13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

For a discussion of the documentary evidence, refer to Considine and Griffiths Architects with Erickson and Taylor Historians: 'Central Government Offices Perth; Conservation Plan, August 1998' (prepared for Department of Contract and Management Services on behalf of Government Property Office).

#### **13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE**

For a discussion of the documentary evidence, refer to Considine and Griffiths Architects with Erickson and Taylor Historians: 'Central Government Offices Perth; Conservation Plan, August 1998' (prepared for Department of Contract and Management Services on behalf of Government Property Office).

#### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Considine and Griffiths Architects with Erickson and Taylor Historians: 'Central Government Offices Perth; Conservation Plan, August 1998' (prepared for Department of Contract and Management Services on behalf of Government Property Office).