



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 group comprises places which are notable examples of civic minded architecture of their respective periods: the end of the Gold Boom/pre-World War One/pre Depression for WA Trustee Co and Royal Insurance Building; and Depression period for Newspaper House. (Criterion 1.1)

The group demonstrates an awareness of international design trends and adaptations of the same. It also demonstrates an understanding of the use of diversity within a coherent grouping. (Criterion 1.2)

In the group, the visual rhythm of the facades and the entrances provides an interesting and urbane character, particularly at street level. (Criterion 1.3)

Despite the loss of St George's House, the group of WA Trustee Co, Royal Insurance Building and Newspaper House form a coherent group, occupying a 60m street frontage, which is equivalent to 1/5 of an east-west streetblock frontage. The conjunction of prestigious commercial development adjacent to Perth Technical College, which, when constructed, was the foremost tertiary institution in the state, established a relationship between commerce and education which endured for over fifty years. The group illustrates the manner in which commercial development from the Gold Boom period, through the post World War One period maintained the 1:1 proportion of height of facade to width of street. In Perth this streetscape proportioning was maintained until the original CML Building was constructed, in 1936, at the corner of St George's Terrace and Sherwood Court. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The site on which Perth Technical College is located, in the early years of the colony, was a holding of Henry Willey Reveley. Plans show the manner in which Reveley's Mill and spring fed mill pond were linked by a mill race down the steep slope to Bazaar Terrace, along the Perth Foreshore. This is the site from which public tertiary education disseminated in this state, through the earlier manifestations of Perth Technical College, and its associations with the University of Adelaide, School of Mines, University of Western Australia and the Western Australian Institute of technology. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

Newspaper House and its news printing halls and presses were constructed for the Centenary of the West Australian in 1932. The Daily News preceeded the West Australian newspaper as an occupant of the site. The site, therefore, has a long term association with some of the major newspapers of their time. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

The WA Trustee Co. building was the longtime headquarters of this important WA institution and the Royal Insurance Building was the last pre-war insurance building to be constructed in Central Perth. (Criterion 2.1)

Many significant people have studied at Perth Technical College, such as Sir Charles Gairdner and Sir Walter James. Perth City Council ratebooks show a number of notable tenants in the commercial buildings of the group. The Newspaper House Art Gallery was the home for the Perth Society of Artists and the venue for a number of first solo exhibitions by important WA artists. (Criterion 2.3)

This group demonstrates the changing civic ethos of this part of St George's Tce from the late Convict period through to the Depression. As a coherent group of public and semi public buildings they illustrate the civic design ethos in St George's Tce from the Gold Boom to Depression. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Perth Technical College was the venue for the first tertiary educational activity in the state. In its earlier manifestations the college incorporated a School of Mines. The main stairwell in the College building contains trapdoors which, when opened allow creation of a shaft akin to a mine. (Criterion 3.1)

The group demonstrates the changing fortunes and social values experienced in Central Perth between the Convict Period and the onset of the Depression. (Criterion 3.2)

The architects Hobbs, Smith and Forbes demonstrate an increasing facility in the use of steel frame, metal framed windows, lifts, concrete slab floors, which were all relatively new materials and innovative methods of using them. They also showed dexterity and innovation in the manner with which they applied facades of freer styles and increased modernity. This innovation was constrained by the need to maintain the ensemble and prestigious character of the group as the "best address" of the time in St George's Terrace. The stylistic progression and design interaction between the commercial buildings of the group, their extension of the St George's Terrace Gold Boom streetscape to west of William Street, transposed into the design idiom of the period between the World Wars, is place making of a high order. (Criterion 3.3)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The activities for which these buildings were constructed encompass an important group of institutions, particularly within the life of Perth, eg Perth Technical College, WA Trustees and *The West Australian*. These activities of education, news dissemination and estate management have been important social, educational and cultural activities as the population of Perth grew, was educated and increased in prosperity. These activities illustrate the emergence of middle class values. (Criterion 4.1)

Because the places have had little change to their fabric or their context the civic design principles of their respective periods, embodied in the group, can be more easily recognised and understood than occurs elsewhere in St George's Terrace. (Criterion 4.1)

The WA Trustee Co flag pole provided the weather signals for Perth through the use of different flags signalling weather forecasts. The clock on Newspaper House provided an appropriate landmark meeting place for a city rendezvous, often followed by a visit to the coffee house in Newspaper House arcade. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

No other group of places within Central Perth covered this conjunction of activities so representative of the periods of development in Perth. No other group of this period exists on St George's Terrace to demonstrate the civic design aspirations of the periods from late Convict period through to the Depression. No other centre in Western Australia has a comparable group of buildings. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Buildings of the group are all good architectural examples of their style and period. The places function as a group because the simple conjunction of building types was one of the understood rules 'of the game'. The clear distinction between public and private sector buildings in style, materials and scale, was understood and consciously used as a civic design element. (Criterion 6.1)

Each of the places in the group clearly demonstrates the civic design principles of the day which applied to development within St George's Terrace, for their class of building. As the places have had little change to their fabric or their context, the civic design principles of their respective periods, embodied in the group can be more easily recognised and understood than occurs elsewhere in St George's Terrace. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Perth Technical College has had considerable remedial work undertaken to correct the effects of subsidence, which has now stabilised. The interior is intact except for superficial damage to the lining materials.

Newspaper House has had some restoration work undertaken to the front half of the building; the rear and upper floors and relatively intact but considerable vandal damage has occurred to glazed partitions, walls etc.

The Royal Insurance and WA Trustees buildings are very intact, but have also suffered damage from vandals and water damage has occurred to the rear, resulting in the lifting of the parquet flooring.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The original fabric of the properties is substantially intact and in reasonably sound structural condition.

The three post World War One buildings are of framed construction. These buildings have the capacity for considerable adaptation of their secondary internal spaces without unduly compromising the integrity of the major internal spaces and facades of the properties.

On the other hand, Perth Technical College is basically of load bearing construction, and this needs to be respected in any recycling of the building, for its integrity to be maintained.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Externally, Newspaper House and Perth Technical College remain in their original state, providing that Newspaper House was constructed as a four-storey facade to St George's Terrace.

Royal Insurance Building and WA Trustee Co have each had an additional storey added, since they were originally constructed. The Royal Insurance Building addition is in contrasting style to the main facade and detracts from it. The WA Trustee addition, on the other hand, is a notable example of how buildings of this type and style can be extended in a manner which is entirely in character.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

All information used in this documentation is taken from a 'Draft Report of Newspaper House Group', prepared by Hocking Planning & Architecture Pty Ltd, for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, March 1993.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

[NB. Perth Technical College (1910) and the Old Perth Boys' School form a pair of educational buildings which have co-existed for more than 80 years. Although the Old Perth Boys' School is not included in this assessment it will be referred to because of its close relationship with the other buildings].

The Post World War One buildings - WA Trustee Co. (1925), Royal Insurance Building (1929) and Newspaper House (1932), together with the now demolished St George's House - were designed as a commercial development and were consciously composed as an ensemble by the same architects Hobbs, Smith and Forbes. This group provided some of the best commercial addresses of the day. Perth City Council ratebooks show the range of tenants from Millars Karri and Jarrah Co, Swan Brewery Company, architects Hobbs, Smith and Forbes to Baden Powell.

Newspaper House was built in time for the centenary of *The West Australian* newspaper. Construction of newspaper house moved *The West Australian* onto the site of the *Daily News* newspaper. *The West Australian* has been associated with many notable personalities, in particular Winthrop Hackett. Hackett's fortune was built on the success of *The West Australian*, the founding of St George's College and important purchases by the Art Gallery. He was also one of the people directly involved with the establishment of Perth Modern School.

In 1934, the Royal Institute of British Architects (R.I.B.A.) Bronze Medal award, presented in November 1935 to Hobbs, Forbes and partners for the design of Newspaper House, was strictly in accordance with an award for 'Street Architecture.' The jury, comprising five architects and two laymen, made the award for the best street facade completed during the three years ending on 31 December 1934. In 1932 the Royal Insurance building had been awarded third place.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Perth Technical College was designed with a horizontal emphasis, counterbalanced by its strong vertical entrance tower, substantial gabled ends at each end, vertical accents, and capped by gables centrally to each classroom wing. Its horizontality is contrasted with the general vertical emphasis of the Gold Boom and post World War One periods of development. Usually commercial developments occupied much narrower street frontages than the 55m planned for the Technical College facade.

The College was designed to eventually replace the old Perth Boys School to the west. This would have provided the College with a long street facade symmetrical about the central tower. Perth Technical College picks up the pattern of civic buildings having a central entrance flanked by towers, or set

within a tower. For example, the Barracks, the Cloisters, Trinity Church, former Christian Brothers College.

Because of its wide street frontage and the need for horizontal organisation, Perth Technical College deliberately broke with the 1:1 ratio of height of facade to width of street. However, the tower repeats the 1:1 ratio.

The WA Trustee Co. was formerly known as the WA Trustee, Executor & Agency Co Ltd, and various other names. The building is late Edwardian in style, more subdued in character and more sober in style than equivalent commercial Gold Boom buildings. Nonetheless it maintains the development patterning established for St George's Terrace commercial development during the Gold Boom period:

- street frontage normally half the width of and original Town Lot;
- built to front boundary for its whole width;
- raised ground floor, providing a basement for ancillary activities directly accessible to St George's Terrace;
- facade follows the classical vocabulary of a street related base, middle, and capping or cornice;
- WA Trustees Co was originally the same height as St Georges House to the east, at 4 1/2 storeys in height.

The building subsequently had a floor added to it, making it 5 1/2 storeys in height. This addition was designed sympathetically and has maintained the character of the old building. WA Trustee Co established the general 1:1 ratio of height of facade to width of street for this commercial group.

Whilst very different in style and character to Perth Technical College, WA Trustee Co relied on building to the street facade to establish a simple planar relationship between the facades, even though the College facade was set back the depth of its entry steps.

The Royal Insurance Building is of an eclectic freestyle design which makes reference to contemporary influences from overseas whilst remaining a good example to the WA Trustee Co. Despite its stylistic freedom it retains the pattern of St George's Terrace commercial development of a facade built to the street line, a raised ground floor above a basement, accessible from the street, a grand central entrance and a facade divided into base, middle and entablature.

An upper floor addition in the late 1950s is unsympathetic to the character of the facade and to the composition of this group of buildings.

Newspaper House was constructed during the Depression, and completed in time for the centenary celebrations of the West Australian. It occupies the whole street frontage of Perth Town Lot L13. Its Art Deco influenced facade was designed to refer to its neighbours WA Trustee Co and Royal Insurance to the west and St Georges House to the east.

Newspaper House generally repeats the contemporary pattern of commercial St George's Terrace developments but introduced significant changes at street level. Instead of the raised ground floor above a basement, housing ancillary activities, these were brought to ground level and arrayed either side of a central ground level arcade. The arcade traffic was generated by the need for

public access to the main hall of Newspaper House which was located deep into the block. (Newspaper house is one of the first examples in Perth of a magnet recessed within a street block served by an arcade.)

Newspaper House was seen by its contemporaries as a modern and dynamic building. This is consistent with the impact of other newspaper buildings overseas, such as the *Daily Express*, London, and the *Chicago Tribune*, whose new headquarters attracted worldwide interest is a direct result of their stylistic innovations.

13. 3 REFERENCES

Hocking Planning & Architecture Pty. Ltd., 'Draft Report of Newspaper House Group', prepared for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, March 1993.

13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH
