



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 0896
2. **Name.** Round House, and Arthur Head Reserve (1830-31)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry.**
Arthur Head Reserve, including the Round House and the Kerosene Store, being Reserve 21563.
4. **Local Government Area.** City of Fremantle
5. **Location.** Western end of High Street, Fremantle
6. **Owner.** Vested in the City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The Round House was constructed in 1830-31, almost immediately upon the settlement of the Swan River Colony, not so much to house local criminals, but unruly strangers to the port and the drunks amongst the less hopeful of arrivals.¹

The Round House was designed by Henry Willey Reveley, an architect and engineer, who had accepted the position of Civil Engineer to the Colony.² Reveley was involved with the design of all of the early public buildings in the colony, including the Round House, Government Offices, Commissariat Stores, Courthouse and the first Government House.

The building is twelve sided and self-contained. All rooms face an inner courtyard, which provides for light and ventilation, and was used as an exercise yard. The design was based on Bentham's panopticon,³ and thus embodied the latest design principles of incarcerative architecture at the time.⁴ However the built version was scaled down from the preliminary sketches.⁵

After some debate on the relative merits of the building of the cliff or on the flats, the Arthur's head site was chosen and tenders were called, in July 1830. The choice of such a prominent site, terminating High Street, was symbolic of the role

¹ Pitt-Morison, M. "Settlement and Development: The Historical Context" in Pitt-Morison, M. and White, J. (eds) *Western Towns and Buildings* (UWAP, 1979) p11.

² Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p2.

³ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p3.

⁴ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. (Paris 1975, trans. London, 1977) pp200-203

⁵ Preliminary sketches for the Round House are held in the WA State Archives .

of Law and Order within the community and to influence urban perceptions of Fremantle ever since. A pencil drawing (1832) by Lieut.G.P.Dashwood illustrates how the Roundhouse was to physically and psychologically dominate the community.⁶

The successful tender was that of Mr. Richard Lewis of R.Lewis and Co., in partnership with W.A.Manning and I.Duffield. Work commenced in August 1830, with the contractor agreeing "to finish the same in a masterly manner on Arthur's Head for £1840 and to find security for doing the same."⁷ The work was actually completed for the sum of £1603/10/0, the lower cost possibly because of the ready availability of building stone on site.⁹ Completed on the 18th January 1831¹⁰, the Round House was constructed by local labourers using local building materials. The construction time of five months was remarkably short, considering the paucity of skilled labour and materials in the colony at the time.¹¹

In 1833, Reveley researched the depth needed for a well as being 45 feet deep, and this was dug within the central courtyard.¹²

In 1837, the Fremantle Whaling Company, which had been established in 1836 and used a little jetty on Bathers Beach, requested that a tunnel be cut from Bathers Beach through Arthur's Head, and under the Round House, to connect with High Street. In return the company would construct a breakwater to protect ships of up to 150 tons. The cost of the tunnel was met by the Whaling Company, and Reveley directed the works.¹³

Stocks were in use outside the Round House, until 1849. The first execution in the colony, in 1844, took place on a gallows erected ten yards north of the Round House entrance.¹⁴ In 1835 a courthouse, designed by Reveley, was built just south of the Round House, but it was later replaced by a new courthouse in 1851, also designed by Reveley, and built to the north of the Round House. The older courthouse was then extended and converted into the Harbour Master's house. The new courthouse (1851), north of the Round House, and the old courthouse

⁶ Pitt-Morison, M. "Settlement and Development: The Historical Context" in Pitt-Morison, M. and White, J. (eds) *Western Towns and Buildings* (UWAP, 1979) p13.

⁷ Quoted in Wright, R.P., and Smeed, H. *Western Landmarks*. (UWAP, 1978) p49; Letter dated 20th August 1830 by W.A. Manning, held in Batty Library.

⁸ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p3.

⁹ Campbell, R.McK. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984) p7.

¹⁰ Cownie, S. & M. *Fremantle and Rottneest. Buildings classified and recorded by the National Trust*. (Perth 1978) frontispiece

¹¹ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p4.

¹² Campbell, R.McK. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984) p8.

¹³ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p5. It is interesting to note that the jetty was constructed with prison labour.

¹⁴ Ward, K., *A Fremantle Sketchbook* p4; Boylen, G. "Taste of prison at the old port city" in *The West Australian*, Friday 4th Jan.1991 pg 14 of liftout.

(1835), now converted to the Harbour Master's house, are evident in an 1890's photograph.¹⁵

However, following the arrival of convicts in 1851 and the completion of the Fremantle Prison in 1857, the Round House ceased to be used as a prison. Instead it was utilised as a lock-up in association with the new courthouse, and as a repository for bond men caught breaking evening curfew.¹⁶ The Round House was also used as a lockup for Aboriginal prisoners on their way to the penal establishment on Rottnest Island.¹⁷

A new courthouse was built in Marine Terrace in the 1880's and subsequently the Round House and the courthouse at Arther Head became less important in the justice system. The Round House lost its status as a prison in 1886, when the Imperial Government shifted responsibility for public buildings to the Colonial Government and the newly created Public Works Department.¹⁸ The building became the responsibility of the police, who used it as a lock up until 1900. It then was converted to living quarters for a chief constable, his wife and ten children.¹⁹

In 1922, the engineering department of the Public Works suggested the Round House be demolished, because of some danger of the walls collapsing. A tender of £10 was received to remove the building, however the Harbour Master complained that the removal of the building would subject his house to the full strength of the north-westerly gales and the house would probably suffer damage as a consequence. Finally, £15 was voted to be spent on the damaged sections of wall, and the whole was left standing.²⁰ The second courthouse was not so fortunate: it was demolished in 1904 to make way for the four Pilots' cottages.

In 1928, the demolition of the Harbour Master's house reactivated the question of the demolition of the Round House once again, but representations from several groups of interested people to the Premier resulted in the Minister for Works being instructed "...that unless some really weighty reasons exists for its destruction we ought to endeavour to preserve the relic". In 1929 an expenditure of £85 was authorised for repairs to the Round House.²¹

In 1934 the W.A. Historical Society began to take a lively interest in the Round House, as a potential museum site. The Society discussed the proposal at numerous meetings with representatives of Fremantle City Council, the Shiplover's Society, Fremantle Harbour Trust, and the Railway Department.

¹⁵ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p6.

¹⁶ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p6.

¹⁷ Boylen, G. "Taste of prison at the old port city" in *The West Australian*, Friday 4th Jan.1991 pg 14 of liftout.

¹⁸ Boylen, G. "Taste of prison at the old port city" in *The West Australian*, Friday 4th Jan.1991 pg 14 of liftout.

¹⁹ *Arthur Head Reserve, Fremantle : Round House* (City of Fremantle Information Sheet, February 1990) p1

²⁰ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p7.

²¹ Quoted in Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p7.

Little was achieved until 1936, when an Order was made in Council to vest Reserve 21563 in the Fremantle Harbour Trust for the preservation and protection of its historic buildings. A variety of proposals were put forward regarding the use, preservation and landscaping of the site, with Fremantle City Council contributing £250, the Railway Department £75 and the State Government making labour available, to a sum of £500, to begin preservation of the Round House. Preparations began, but the outbreak of World War Two put these plans on hold.²²

In 1966 Fremantle Port Authority opened the Round House to the public for two hours daily, week-ends and holidays excepted. The site proved popular as a tourist attraction. Sir Frederick Samson, Mayor of Fremantle, later said "In the past six years 25,000 people from 44 countries have been through the old Roundhouse .."²³.

The structure of the Round House was consolidated in 1975, with assistance from the Australian Heritage Commission,²⁴ but three years later the Fremantle Port Authority decided to close the building because the cost of staffing the place during visiting hours and of maintaining tidy surrounding was estimated at approximately \$1200 per annum.²⁵ The Round House was kept open by the Historical Society for some time before responsibility for the Arthur Head Reserve and the buildings, including the Round House, were taken over by the City of Fremantle in 1982.²⁶ The Round House was opened to the public soon afterwards and is now open to the public seven days a weeks between 10am and 5pm.

The Round House is a major tourist attraction in Fremantle, and is used as an educative resource by various branches of the Education Department and the tertiary institutions.²⁷

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The Round House is situated high upon a limestone outcrop (Arthur's Head) at the western end of High Street. Early views of the Round House, show it to be surrounded by a cluster of buildings, built of the same stone and forming a dense line of structure along the western end of High Street.²⁸ Today the place is clear

²² Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p8.

²³ Press clipping Hutchinson, D. *The Making of the Fremantle Museum*. (Western Australian Museum Information Series Number 2. Perth) back cover.

²⁴ Campbell, R.McK. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984) p18.

²⁵ National Trust Assessment Exposition

²⁶ Boylen, G. "Taste of prison at the old port city" in *The West Australian*, Friday 4th Jan.1991 pg 14 of liftout.

²⁷ Campbell, R.McK. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984) p27

²⁸ Battye Library photograph included in Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.)

of most of these buildings and the visual emphasis on the squat shape of the Round House, outlined against the sky, is more imposing.

Built of local limestone, the Round House is an unadorned windowless duodecahedron containing twelve compartments. Originally, these comprised eight single storey cells, and a latrine ranged around the central court. The remaining three segments of the building were thought to be of two storeys, accommodating the entrance and the warder's quarters.

The walls are of local limestone. A flight of jarrah edged concrete steps from the entrance down to ground level covers a small bakehouse, built within the main structure. A further flight of steps leads directly down the cliff face to High Street.

The cells were originally roofed with weatherboards, and the warder's quarters with a limestone concrete. Alterations to the roof included placing shingles over the single storey cells. However, a photograph (c.1875) appears to show the roof completely flat, and a report refers to guards using the roof as an observation post.²⁹ At a later stage the roof line was raised and sheeted with corrugated iron.

Floors in the rear cells are natural stone, levelled with limestone concrete, while floors in the front rooms, where the ground falls away steeply, are suspended timber floors. The space below these floors may have been used for storage.³⁰ Timber planking was applied to the cell walls at an early date to prevent prisoners chipping through the limestone and escaping.

In 1966 a small section of the steps at the foot of the Round House was demolished to provide space for the laying of a standard gauge railway. W.A.G.R. made good the steps in a new location and constructed a new stone abutment on the High Street front.³¹

Between 1959 and 1966 expenditure on the maintenance of the Round House was very low averaging between \$800 and \$1,000 per annum.³²

In 1975, conservation work funded by the Australian Heritage Commission included underpinning and buttressing sections of those external walls in danger of collapse; grouting and pointing the limestone generally; re-roofing; joinery repairs; new drainage; new wiring and lighting and painting.³³

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

1. AESTHETIC

²⁹ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) p4.

³⁰ Campbell, R.McK. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.) pp3,4

³¹ National Trust Assessment Exposition

³² National Trust Assessment Exposition

³³ Campbell, R.McK. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984) p18.

The building terminates the western vista of High Street, defining the built environment boundary of the commercial centre of the city and making a strong visual statement to the West End of Fremantle. The use of local limestone gives the Round House an organic quality in relation to the limestone headland upon which it is sited.

The Round House, together with the Police, Station and the Courthouse nearby, formed a precinct which both defined the physical and the legal boundaries of the town. The place exhibits unusual design characteristics in both its 12 sided design form and the siting of the structure above a tunnel through to the whaling station and the massive simplicity of the design of the building implies its strength and is well suited to its function.

The strong unadorned, geometric form of the tunnel entrance mirrors that of the pediment over the Round House.

2. HISTORIC

The building is highly significant for being the oldest extant public building in Western Australia.

It has a close association the H.W. Reveley, the first Civil Engineer to the Colony. It is significant as being one of only two existing buildings in Western Australia designed by him to be extant.

The building was the only Gaol in Western Australia prior to Transportation in 1851.

The site also has historic significance regarding the settlement of Fremantle, the urban planning which resulted from the siting of the City in relation to the Round House and the history of whaling and commercial enterprise in Fremantle.

3. SCIENTIFIC

The place yields information about prisons and incarcerative conditions in the nineteenth century.

The place also yields information about early building techniques and the scale and type of public works in the Colony.

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The site is socially significant for being the first prison in Western Australia and for being the first public building in the Colony.

The prominent position indicate the social importance giving to deterrence and symbols of justice.

It is a highly significant tourist attraction in the City of Fremantle.

5. RARITY

The Round House is the earliest extant colonial building in Western Australia.

The Round House is one of two remaining public buildings designed by H.W.Reveley in Western Australia. (The other is the old Court House, Perth)

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The Round House is representative of early colonial architectural and building practice in the Swan River Colony.

The Round House is representative of early nineteenth century colonial penal architecture in the Swan River Colony.

CONDITION

The Round House is continually maintained and is in reasonable condition.

INTEGRITY

The Round House retains a high degree of integrity

AUTHENTICITY

Despite some modifications to the structure, the Round House remains substantially intact and has a high degree of authenticity.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Round House is of exceptional cultural significance for the following;

it is the first permanent public building, and the oldest extant (European) building, in Western Australia.

it has a close association with, and is a demonstration of, the colonial system of law and order

it is one of only two extant buildings by H.W.Reveley, the first colonial engineer in the Swan River Colony (Western Australia).

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 20/11/1992

Permanent Entry 19/11/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

National Trust Assessment Exposition

Campbell, R.K. *The Round House Report no.2* (Fremantle, October, 1973.)

Campbell, R.K. *A First Draft Conservation Management Plan: the Round House and Arthur Head, Fremantle* (Australian Heritage Commission and Fremantle City Council, June 1984)

City of Fremantle Local History Collection.