



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No** 0982
2. **Name** Fremantle Fire Station (former) (1908)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry** The Fremantle Fire Station (former) and the land on which it stands, being Reserve 34837.
4. **Local Government Area** City of Fremantle
5. **Location** 18 Phillimore Street, Fremantle
6. **Owner** Vested in the City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former Fremantle Fire Station is a two storey stone, brick and stucco building in Phillimore Street, built in 1908 to house the Fremantle Fire Brigade. It was built for the Fire Brigade Board.

A volunteer fire brigade had been formed in Fremantle in the early 1880's, and received its first (horse drawn) fire engine from London in 1884. The fire brigade was housed in a fire station on the corner of Croke and Mouat Streets. However, the increasing size of Fremantle and the need for a new and more capacious fire station led to the acquisition of Crown land in Phillimore Street in exchange for the site on Croke and Mouat Streets.¹

The new Fremantle fire station was designed by the architectural partnership of Cavanagh and Cavanagh, who had previously designed the Central Fire Station in Murray Street, Perth. The Fremantle fire station was designed to house four horse-drawn vehicles, including the district ambulance which was also operated by the firemen.²

Cavanagh and Cavanagh called for tenders for the new fire station on the 29th of February, 1908.³ The lowest tender, from Mr J. Lake, was accepted at the beginning

¹ Emmett, S. "The day the water caught fire" *Fremantle Gazette* 20 Feb. 1990 p27.

² Emmett, S. "The day the water caught fire" *Fremantle Gazette* 20 Feb. 1990 p27.

³ *The W.A. Mining, Building and Engineering Journal* (29/2/1908) p19

of April, 1908.⁴ There was some initial controversy surrounding the building of the fire station, because neither the Fire Brigade nor the contractor, Mr. Lake, had submitted the plans and specifications of the building to the Fremantle Council for approval, nor applied for permission to proceed prior to beginning work on the foundations. As a result, the Mayor took out a Supreme Court injunction against Mr Lake for breaching the by-laws.⁵ The injunction remained in force for a little over a month ,until plans were submitted. They were immediately accepted by the Fremantle Council.⁶

The foundation stone was formally laid on June 19, 1908.⁷ and the building completed in 1909. The building was constructed of West Australian Donnybrook freestone, as was the Customs house nearby,⁸ and the roofing was of imported Marseilles tiles.

The fire station was manned with two regular firefighters and twenty volunteers. It boasted twenty-two alarms linked directly to the major buildings in town. There were also fifteen direct telephone lines and ten house emergency call bells connected to the firemen's homes.

Within 12 months of operation, and in response to the increased danger of fire from the busy wharves and newly built grain silos in Fremantle, Western Australia's first motorised fire tender was purchased to cope with any additional fire danger.

During the Second World War, the building was cleared of firemen and the U.S. Marines took over the building for living quarters. The Communications centre remained at the station manned by five local women but the tenders were housed in the woolsheds alongside the wharves as a security measure.⁹

The most significant fire to which the fire station had to attend was in 1944 when there was a substantial fire on the wharf, and the water, covered by oil slicks, blazed.¹⁰

By 1974, the building was proving too cramped for modern firefighting equipment. A spokesman for the Fire Brigade Board claimed the Fire Station had outlived its usefulness for modern firefighting and that "...the present station was built in the days of the horse and cart. It was too outdated to service the area properly. It had only three fire engines and the men of 24-hour standby were living in poor conditions."¹¹ At the time the North Fremantle Brigade was in the process of being amalgamated with the Fremantle Brigade and therefore the Fire Board sought a suitable central location. The Fire Brigade Board proposed to demolish the existing Fire Station and to build a new complex on the site, but Fremantle City Council, backed by a concerted public campaign, wanted the old building retained and suggested the new station be built

⁴ *The W.A. Mining, Building and Engineering Journal* (28/3/1908) p 20.

⁵ Fremantle Council Minutes 30 April 1908 item 5.

⁶ Fremantle Council Minutes 4th May 1908 item 4 and Fremantle Council Minutes 18th May, 1908 item 2.

⁷ *Fremantle Gazette* 29th July, 1977, front page

⁸ *The W.A. Mining, Building and Engineering Journal* (2 May 1908) p 19

⁹ Emmett, S. "The day the water caught fire" *Fremantle Gazette* 20 Feb. 1990 p27.

¹⁰ Emmett, S. "The day the water caught fire" *Fremantle Gazette* 20 Feb. 1990 p27.

¹¹ "Board condemns fire station " *The West Australian* 17 Jan 1974 p

elsewhere. The adjacent vacant site was ideal for the new fire station, except for a railway siding behind the back fence, which would prevent expansion northwards. W.A.G.R. agreed to relocate the siding to accommodate the new fire station on condition that the existing fire station was retained.¹²

The new fire station opened, next door, in 1977. The former Fire Station was vested in the City of Fremantle in the same year, and then leased to Agnew Brockway, real estate agents and Robin McK. Campbell, a well known Fremantle conservation architect, on condition that the place was conserved. The lessees established commercial offices on the upper floor of the building and sub-let the large downstairs area to a restaurateur. The restaurateur established a fire station "theme" restaurant, called the Fire House Restaurant, which incorporated many of the original fixtures and fittings. This use, while at odds with the original purpose of the building, conserved the interior and exterior of the building. It continues to be used in this manner.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Sited on the western side of Phillimore Street the two storey stone, brick and stucco building is designed in the Federation Free Classical style.¹³ Unlike the asymmetrically picturesque Central Fire Station in Perth, the Fremantle building is of a symmetrical design, consisting of a low horizontal body flanked by two slightly projecting shallow gabled wings. This was a formal composition favoured by Michael Cavanagh for many of his institutional buildings, including the Convent of Mercy, Bunbury, St Joseph's Boys School, Clontarf and even the Orient Hotel, Fremantle.

The horizontality of the building is emphasised by the rendered rustication of the ground floor, the red flemish bond brickwork on the upper floor, a contrasting rendered frieze and the strong dentils below the shallow pitch of the Marseilles tiled roof. The symmetry of the design is reinforced by rendered architraves to the upper storey windows and decorative soffits to a first floor string dado. There is a small wrought iron balcony projecting over the entrance, at the southern end of the facade which, although not repeated at the opposite end, does not detract from the symmetry of the facade.

Decoration to the building is modest, consisting of foliage and scroll work, incorporating the initials FBB on the southern pediment and a fireman's helmet on the northern pediment. The architraves surrounding the windows enliven the facade, providing rhythm and balance to the upper storey, while the rusticated treatment of the ground storey and the recessed doorways convey an impression of strength. The building is roofed with Marseilles tiles, and decorated with terra-cotta finials and ridge crestings.

Internally little of the fabric has been changed. The ground floor ceiling is high, to accommodate the fire trucks, and this necessitated a the steep staircase to the upper

¹² "West End Success Story" in *Fremantle Gazette* 14 Feb. 1980 p 4

¹³ *Apperley, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P.A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. (Angus and Roberston, North Ryde, 1989) p104-107*

floor. The ground floor walls are tiled to the dado. A fireman's pole links the first floor with the ground floor.

The building was used as an active fire station until 1977, at which time it was adapted for use as offices and a restaurant. Most of the building's original details were retained in this process.

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.

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

The former Fremantle Fire Station is a well modulated example of the Federation Free Classical style of public building.

It is a fine example of the public architectural work of Cavanagh and Cavanagh.

The building terminates the western vista of Henry Street, and in its style and design contributes an important element to the urban and historic character of the Phillimore Street precinct.

2. HISTORIC VALUE

The former Fremantle Fire Station has historic significance as a demonstration of a time when civic services were provided by volunteer forces and later, by professionals.

The place has close associations with the gild boom development of Fremantle as a port and city, and demonstrates the increasing technical and cultural sophistication of public services in Fremantle.

The place has a long and close association with the Fire Brigade and the history of firefighting in Western Australia.

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The former Fremantle Fire Station has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the development of fire fighting services in Western Australia.

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The former Fremantle Fire Station is indicative of the provision of civic services in Fremantle. It contributes to the sense of place and identity of Fremantle's West End as the mercantile centre of the port city. The high regard in which it is held by the local community and government was instrumental in the retention of the building at a time when it was considered no longer functional by the Fire Brigade.

5. RARITY

There are few extant fire stations of the gold boom period (1895-1915) in the metropolitan Perth.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The place is a fine example of Federation Free Classical architecture.

The place is representative of turn of the century fire management and civic services prior to the common use of motor vehicles.

CONDITION

The building is in sound condition.

INTEGRITY

While the building is no longer used for its original purpose the current use has capitalised on the features of the fire station. The building retains a considerable degree of integrity.

AUTHENTICITY

Little of the building fabric has been altered, and the former fire station retains a high degree of authenticity.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Fremantle Fire Station has cultural significance for the following:

the place has historic significance related to the important role of civic services, and the Fire Brigade in particular, in the development of the Fremantle, and Western Australia.

the building is part of a suite of buildings that contribute to the urban and historic character of the Phillimore Street precinct, the loss of which would be detrimental to the scale and character of the precinct.

the building is a representative example of the architectural design of Cavanagh and Cavanagh, and

it is one of the few fire stations of the gold boom period still extant in metropolitan Perth.

8. Register Of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 20/11/1992

Permanent Entry 16/11/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet

City of Fremantle Local History Collection.

National Trust Assessment Form