



# 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\*

*Old Gaol*, with its Victorian Georgian style and articulate front elevation clearly expressing its internal arrangement, has high aesthetic value. (Criterion 1.2)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Old Gaol* is evidence of the former prosperity of the town of Cue in its boom time at the turn of the century. It demonstrates the significance of the town's contribution to the surrounding districts. (Criterion 2.2)

*Old Gaol* is significant because it is a reminder of the treatment of prisoners in former times. It also serves as an example of the way in which of the way in which a community can alter its perceptions of the value of a building. (Criterion 2.2)

*Old Gaol* is associated with the infamous multiple murderer, 'Snowy' Rowles. (Criterion 2.3)

*Old Gaol* has historic value as it was designed and constructed during a period of great social change. This is one of a number of small gaols still extant within the state. (Criterion 2.1)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

*Old Gaol* has scientific value in that it is an example of how not to repair a soft porphyry wall suffering from acute water and damp damage. The render that was applied is stronger than the stonework itself, resulting in the render delaminating from the stonework. Water has entered the resulting gap thus causing further deterioration. While it is unlikely that *Old Gaol* can be restored, it could be used as a test building for future repair techniques considered for other buildings in the area displaying similarly deteriorating stonework. (Criterion 3.1)

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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* North Ryde NSW, Angus & Robertson 1989.

#### **11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE**

*Old Gaol* contributes to the community of Cue's sense of place because it is a reminder of the important role the town held in the district during its boom time. (Criterion 4.2)

#### **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

The unusual design of *Old Gaol* was produced by the Public Works Department during a time of leadership vacuum when designs were accepted from a variety of people. The result is interesting for its variation from the standard designs. (Criterion 5.1)

##### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

The robust and confident design of *Old Gaol* reflects the optimism of the society that produced it.(Criterion 6.2)

##### **12. 3 CONDITION**

The condition of *Old Gaol* is extremely poor. Large sections of existing stonework would have to be removed, the remaining structure supported, and matching stonework integrated into the structure in order for the original appearance to be approximated. Even if this were achieved, ongoing maintenance would be required.

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

*Old Gaol* has moderate integrity, as the original intention of the gaol is no longer intact. The building once performed an important social function which remains obvious, but it now has no discernible use.

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

The application of cement render to the walls, the modifications made when the building was converted into an ablution block and the poor overall condition of *Old Gaol* result in a building of low authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Prue Griffin, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Old Gaol* is a single-storey stone structure with a central yard surrounded by cells. The roof is corrugated iron and the doors and windows feature decorative stone work. *Old Gaol* was constructed in 1896 by the Public Works Department for the Cue townsite and surrounding district.

Cue was established as a result of a gold find reported by Tom Cue in 1892. The location known colloquially as 'The Patch' rapidly filled with prospectors. In 1892, up to one thousand men were fossicking in an area approximately 3 kilometres by 2 kilometres. Conditions were tough, water was scarce and enteric fever swept the camps. A hospital committee was formed to care for the sick but real relief came on 13 May 1892 when water was finally struck in a well dug at the site of the present rotunda. A Progress Committee was formed in 1893 and the townsite of Cue was gazetted on 17 August 1893.<sup>1</sup> From 1893, the townsite rapidly expanded with substantial public and private buildings being erected.<sup>2</sup>

*Cue Public Buildings*, constructed in 1895, included among other facilities, the police station, sergeant's quarters and holding cells adjacent to the court house.<sup>3</sup> Apparently the capacity of the holding cells was found to be inadequate as tenders for a 'lockup' at Cue were called in February 1896.<sup>4</sup> Plans for *Old Gaol* were drawn by the Architectural Division of the Public Works Department but no acceptance of tender notice was published. In October 1896, *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette* reported that:

one of the finest buildings now being erected on the Murchison is the substantial gaol at Cue. It is situated about a chain or two west of the police quarters, and is built of bastard granite, of which the best structures in Cue are built. There is a good concrete foundation and floor. In all there are six cells, but of these two are much larger than the others. There is also a commodious exercise yard, while the lot is surrounded by a wall 16 ft high. Stoutly barred gates are on all the doors, in addition to heavy jarrah ones. All the ceilings are covered with felt, and there are inch sarking boards under the iron, to reduce the heat. Each cell is provided with strong shutters outside the rolled plate-glass window. The gaol will be ready for occupation in about five weeks time, but it is to be hoped that for some time yet there will be more accommodation than required. In future it will not be necessary to send long-sentenced prisoners to Geraldton.<sup>5</sup>

The construction of the building was supervised by A.E. Cox, an Adelaide trained architect who arrived in Western Australia in 1893 and subsequently became prominent in the profession in WA. Cox moved to Cue in 1895 when he was appointed to supervise the construction of *Cue Public Buildings* and the

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with June Gronow of the Geographic Names Section of the Department of Land Administration, 17 March 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Heydon, P. R. *Just a Century Ago A History of the Shire of Cue* Hesperian Press, 1987, p. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Heritage and Conservation Professionals 'Conservation Plan Cue Public Buildings' 1995, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Government Gazette, 14 February 1896, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette* 3 October 1896, p. 5

Post Office at Yalgoo.<sup>6</sup> The cost of construction of *Old Gaol* was reported to be £1,569 1s 3d.<sup>7</sup>

It is an interesting feature of this building that it is not located close to the police station but some 50 metres distant on the other side of Austin Street. Possibly this was because the police station was grouped with the court house and post office which are more public buildings.

When the gaol opened the Police force comprised a Sub-Inspector and 24 men, including a sergeant, corporals, constables and several aboriginal trackers.<sup>8</sup> In February 1906, tenders for a padded cell at *Old Gaol* were called<sup>9</sup>; however, no acceptance notice was published.

The prosperity of Cue did not continue at the rapid pace of the 1890s. The gaol was closed in 1914 but remained as a lockup until the early 1930's. The last prisoner held there is said to have been the infamous multiple murderer, known as 'Snowy' Rowles.<sup>10</sup>

Rowles, or John Thomas Smith, was convicted and hung for the murder of three men working along the No. 1 rabbit proof fence. It was claimed he murdered his victims with strychnine then burnt the bodies. The remains that did not burn provided evidence of Rowles's guilt.<sup>11</sup> The sensational inquest into the disappearance of the missing men was adjourned to Cue in February 1932.<sup>12</sup> Rowles was present at this inquest and may well have been the last resident of *Old Gaol* as claimed by the Shire Clerk in 1961.

In 1960, the State Government Tourist Authority made an offer to local Shires to help fund the establishment of Caravan Parks around the state. The Cue Council decided not to let the offer pass them by. The Shire Clerk suggested the gaol as a good venue for a caravan park as it 'had some historic value.'<sup>13</sup> The Tourist Authority agreed to a rate of £2 to every £1 put in by the Shire for renovations.

The plans put forward for the conversion of *Old Gaol* at this stage were substantially what remains today:

Bathrooms, laundry and toilets could be fitted in this building. Fences are not required but trees are. Lighting is required in the building and on poles in the area. The toilets could be placed in recesses at rear of the building, outside, if required.<sup>14</sup>

It was later agreed that the outer walls needed 'underpinning' because they were badly eroded.<sup>15</sup> However, it was not until two years later, in March 1963, that tenders were called for the conversion of *Old Gaol*. The successful

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<sup>6</sup> Heritage and Conservation Professionals 'Conservation Plan Cue Public Buildings' 1995, pp.10 & 11.

<sup>7</sup> *The Cue Patch* Vol. 4, 19 September 1986, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Government Gazette* 9 February 1906, p.451.

<sup>10</sup> *Shire of Cue Minutes*, Battye Library, Cons 896, AN 57, Item 35, 16 August 1961.

<sup>11</sup> Broomhall, F. H. *The Longest Fence in the World, A History of the No. 1 Rabbit Proof Fence from its Beginning until Recent Times* Hesperian Press, 1991, p. 142-146

<sup>12</sup> *The West Australian*, 18 January 1932, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, Item 34, 19 October 1960.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, Item 35, 21 March 1961.

contractors were Giles and McAuliffe and their employee, M Healy, started work on the stonework in September 1963.

It soon became apparent that the work being done was not complying to the Shire Clerk's specifications.

An analysis has been made of pieces of concrete sent to Cement Sales Ltd. Cockburn Cement Pty Ltd. (state in the main, that the concrete, or mortar as they term it, is aggregate 7.48 Cement 1.

This therefore is 50% more sand then stipulated by me if sand was used, otherwise I wanted 1 cement 3 sand plus metal.<sup>16</sup>

The finance committee withheld payment to the contractor until the concrete was repaired to the Shire Clerk's satisfaction. However what exactly was done to remedy the situation is not specified and when compared to other buildings in Cue of the same fabric, it is clear that the decay of the walls of *Old Gaol* has continued since 1963, if not accelerated. The final contribution of the Tourist Authority to the conversion was £2,474 making the total cost of the conversion approximately £3,700.<sup>17</sup>

Premier David Brand opened the new Caravan Park on 17 April 1964. A booklet was produced for the occasion and the local Social Club catered for the function. The catering included bags of lollies for each school child.<sup>18</sup> On opening the charges for the facilities offered by the Cue Caravan Park were 30/ per week or 7/6 per day.<sup>19</sup>

*Old Gaol* closed as the ablution block for the Caravan Park in October 1977 when new facilities were built.<sup>20</sup> Since that time *Old Gaol* has remained vacant and subject to decay and vandalism. *Old Gaol* is still vacant and in a state of rapid decay. The facework of the outer stonework has in many places been removed by the mortar falling off even though evidence of repairs is visible.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Old Gaol* is located on gently sloping land in the Cue Caravan Park, immediately west of the caretaker's residence, which in turn is west of the Austin Street entrance to the caravan park. South of *Old Gaol* and within the caravan park is a gravel area. To the west, beyond the caravan park are a number of transportable homes and to the north is the main part of the caravan park. Being located about sixty metres between Austin, Victoria and Chesson streets, *Old Gaol* makes little contribution to the streetscape. Within the caravan park, the close proximity of a clothes line on the north, a metal fence surrounding the caretaker's residence, to the east, a few pallets leaning against the western wall and the poor physical condition of *Old Gaol* itself tend to rob the building of any presence it may have.

*Old Gaol* is built in a Victorian Georgian style, as is apparent in its symmetrical layout, segmental arches and simple composition. The generous eaves are somewhat unusual for this style but are a logical variant, providing shade to

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<sup>16</sup> ibid, 18 December 1963.

<sup>17</sup> ibid.

<sup>18</sup> ibid, 18 March 1964.

<sup>19</sup> ibid, 20 May 1964.

<sup>20</sup> *The Cue Patch* 19 September 1986, p. 1.

the small high level windows and also deflecting water away from the soft porphyry walls. The eaves are bracketed off the walls.

The internal layout of *Old Gaol* consists of a central exercise yard, about eight metres by five metres, with the long axis aligned south-east to north-west. Four cells (1, 2, 3 & 4)<sup>21</sup>, each about three and a half metres deep by two metres wide are arranged on the north eastern side of the exercise yard. Two cells (6 & 7) are on the opposite side of the exercise yard. Centrally located at the north-west end is a room (5) which may have been a warden's room but now contains a relatively modern concrete double wash trough.

The front elevation of *Old Gaol* has a centrally located iron entrance gate in a central wall with an originally rendered segmentally arched pediment over, rising from a springing point of about 2.7 metres to a height of about 3 metres. The gate, wall and pediment are set proud of the main wall plane by about 600 mm. The centre of the main parapet wall beyond rises to a height of about five metres, beyond which is the central exercise yard, open to the sky. A central blind rose window is located half way between the top of the entrance pediment below and the top of the parapet wall above. To each side of the exercise yard parapet wall are hipped corrugated metal roofs; iron, painted green, to the southern roof and colourbond Mist Green to the northern roof. The highest parts of the hipped roofs rise to about half a metre below the side parapet walls of the exercise yard, while the gutter line is about the same height as the top of the entrance pediment. The eaves are supported by struts approximately 100 mm by 75 mm, at centres varying from 1.2 to 1.5 metres, which in turn are supported by corbelled stone brackets. On the corners typically a double strut on to a single bracket detail is employed, however on the eastern corner or right hand side of the front elevation this detail is missing, along with a substantial amount of stonework, due to weathering by north-easterly winds. Over most of the external walls a grey cement sand finish render has been applied - this may have been part of the 1963 works and was probably applied to contain the fretting of the porphyry walls. In places such as the north eastern corner and the recessed central plane of the blind rose window, the render has fallen off, removing also accumulated dust and also possibly an ochre finish as well, leaving the stone a very light colour and in poor condition. Under the eaves typically around the building the cement render has never been applied, and the stone is still in reasonably good condition. Also, the grey cement render appears to have never been applied to the rock face stone quoins to the corners of the exercise yard parapet wall and quoins of the blind rose window. These are stating to deteriorate. The base of the wall around the building has a simple plinth, the top of which is about one to half a metre above ground level, which falls in a southern direction.

The simple hipped roofed side elevations were built as mirror images of each other with the exception that the two small high level windows on the south side are further apart than the corresponding windows on the north, reflecting the different cell layout. The majority of the northern roof has been re-roofed and a central roof vent which probably matched the one on the south elevation is no longer extant. Also a cistern, tank and solar panel have been added, probably when *Old Gaol* was converted into an ablution block.

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<sup>21</sup> The numbers in brackets refer to the numbered rooms on the floor plan.

On the south-west elevation the grey render is in a fair condition and has been applied to almost the entire wall. On the north-east however it is in a very poor state, showing evidence of attempted subsequent repairs and, in some places the render has come away altogether, like on the front elevation but to a greater extent. Due to the slight ground slope, the north-east wall is retaining a small amount of earth above floor level, thus exacerbating rising damp.

The western elevation, like the front elevation, expresses the two hipped roofs, over the two rows of cells, each with one small high level end window. A central ablution area projects in plan and has a hipped roof, similarly detailed to the other two hipped roofs. The ablution area has a centrally located grille. The parapet wall of the exercise yard is beyond and in the same plane as the cell walls to each side.

The floor of the exercise yard is concrete, and may be original. The walls are rendered, similarly to the external walls, but generally in much better condition. Like the external walls, rock faced stone quoins to openings have not been rendered.

In the easternmost cell (1), the white washed render to the wall is at high level and towards the exercise yard appears to be original, judging by a ventilation grille located in the eastern corner at a high level. In places the render has come away and the random stone coursing is visible. Up to about two metres above the floor, on the wall opposite the wall backing on to the exercise yard, the original render has been removed and a steel float render has been applied, over which ceramic wall tiles have been fixed. A 200 mm concrete hob has been installed and the remains of shower fittings can be seen. Both the remainder of the concrete floor and the corrugated metal ceiling appear original. The centrally located opening to the exercise yard does not have its original timber door and iron grille as some of the other cells do. A domestic timber door frame has been installed but the door to go with it is not there.

The next cell (2) is similar to the first except that it has not been converted into a shower area.

The third cell (3) along is the most original of the four small cells. Like the second cell, it has not been converted into a shower area. Unlike the second cell it has its original cast iron frame and an original timber brace and panelled door partially off its hinges. The iron grilled door is missing.

The last small cell (4) is similar to the first, however it also has an original iron frame but a non original ledged and braced door.

The two large cells (6 & 7) on the opposite side of the exercise yard are in a more original state than the small cells, and are in a similar condition to each other. The doors to the cells consist of a timber door that swings outwards, consisting of vertical timber boards on top, bottom and side rails. The two diagonal timber braces to both doors are missing. The door is mounted on three iron hinges which in turn are fixed to an iron T section iron frame approximately 120 mm wide by 10 mm thick with the right angle leg about 40 mm by 10 mm thick. At the heads the 120 mm wide section extends to about 200 mm clear of the opening to form a lintel. A grilled iron door, consisting of iron bars at about 75 mm centres, supported by 40 mm by 10 mm iron rails opens inwards into the cell. The large cells differ to the cells opposite in that

the large cells have three leg iron fittings each, fixed to the wall about above floor level. The leg iron fitting consists of a 100 mm internal diameter iron ring, made from 20 mm diameter iron bar, which hangs from an iron eye bolt, the internal ring of which is about 30 mm in diameter.

The walls of the two larger cells (6 & 7) have what appears to be an original render, covered in a whitewash, on random coursed stone walls, which are visible where the render has come away. The south western cell has undergone repairs at low level. Off-form boarded concrete has been used to replace walls that were presumably effected by rising damp, similar to the repairs to the external walls of *Fmr. Bank of New South Wales*. As in that building, the repairs are not visually sympathetic but appear to be effective.

The room opposite the entry gate (5) has a concrete floor, and a grey cement render, similar to that used externally and in the exercise yard, that terminates at a height of about 2.2 metres above floor level.. In places this has come away and the random stone coursing is visible. A timber bench, possibly a warden's bed, is built into the southern wall. There is no ceiling to this room and the underside of the timber roof framing is visible.

### **13. 3 REFERENCES**

National Trust Assessment Exposition, 2 March 1982.

### **13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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