



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.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.26 Providing Health Services

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 401 Community services & utilities

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

St John Ambulance Building is of significance as a definitive example of a building designed in the Inter-War Art Deco style, featuring a simple composition of massed forms finished with render marked to resemble Donnybrook stone. (Criteria 1.1 & 1.2)

St John Ambulance Building contributes to the aesthetic values of the setting in Wellington Street. The siting of the building alongside a car park and to the south of the railway reserve combined with the height and strong massing of the building give it landmark qualities within the environs of the Barrack Street Bridge. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

St John Ambulance Building was built as the headquarters for the St John Ambulance Association, which was established in Western Australia in 1891/1892. It has also accommodated affiliated services such as the Brigade, founded in 1903/1904 and ambulance transport service, which began in the 1910s. It was used as the location for first aid training courses, a museum and library, commandery offices, and for many years served as the central city ambulance depot. (Criterion 2.2)

St John Ambulance Building has associations with the people who have been involved in the management (the Council), who have worked and who have trained at the organisation since 1940 up to c. 1979. The place has some associations with those who founded the Western Australian centre in 1891/1892 including Mathieson Henry Jacoby and Dr George McWilliams. (Criterion 2.3)

St John Ambulance Building was designed by architect J. L. Ochiltree, of the firm Ochiltree and Hargrave. It is thought that Ochiltree designed the place in his capacity as Honorary Architect of the St John Ambulance Association. (Criterion 2.3)

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11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

St John Ambulance Building has social value for its association with this community service organisation for both the people who have worked and trained with the organisation since 1940 up to c. 1979, and for the wider community that has been served by the organisation during this time. (Criterion 4.1)

St John Ambulance Building is valued by the community for its aesthetic and landmark qualities and has particular value for such special interest groups as the Art Deco Society of Western Australia. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

St John Ambulance Building is a rare example of a large, specialised building designed in the Inter-War Art Deco style. (Criterion 5.1)

St John Ambulance Building was designed to accommodate the particular spatial requirements of the St John Ambulance Association, including distinctive ceremonial functions that are no longer practised. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

St John Ambulance Building is a definitive example of a building designed in the Inter-war Art Deco style. (Criterion 6.1)

Similar to fire stations, *St John Ambulance Building* was purpose designed and was built to function as an ambulance transport depot, having such facilities as an easily accessible garage, car service rooms, first aid equipment rooms, a control post, and accommodation for drivers. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

St John Ambulance Building appears to have benefited from a regular and conscientiously carried out programme of maintenance throughout its existence. The interior of the building is in good condition apart from a few isolated areas where there is evidence of damp on the first floor ceiling. The exterior is generally in a sound condition. It is, however, apparent that some areas of the external fabric are in a poor condition and this is mainly as a result of constructional defects.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

St John Ambulance Building has a moderate to high degree of integrity. Although it no longer serves as the headquarters for the St John Ambulance Association and the Brigade, it continues to have some associations with the operations of the organisation.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

St John Ambulance Building is of high authenticity. The fabric of the building both internally and externally is largely unchanged. The authenticity of the building is remarkable, it extends not only to the building fabric but also to internal decorative trims and items such as door hardware and other fittings.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Kristy Bizzaca, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Alan Kelsall, Kelsall Binet Architects.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

St John Ambulance Building is situated at 298-300 Wellington Street, Perth. The site is on the north side of the street almost opposite the intersection with Pier Street, and backs directly on to a railway reserve.

The first St John Ambulance Association centre in Australia was established in Victoria in 1833 with first aid classes starting in Melbourne soon after. By the late 1880s, similar centres had begun in all capital cities in Australia with the exception of Perth. Each centre ran its own affairs and reported to the main St John Association in London, which was founded in 1877.¹ The operations of these centres focussed on the teaching of first aid, the examination of students and the awarding of first aid certificates.²

Mathieson Harry Jacoby started the first Western Australian centre in 1892. Jacoby arrived in Perth from Adelaide in 1891 and it was there that he was first associated with the St John Association having earned a certificate in first aid. Soon after his arrival, Jacoby developed an interest in establishing a St John Ambulance Association centre in Perth and, on 17 November 1891, Jacoby wrote to the London Priory requesting authorisation to set up a centre in this state.³

Jacoby gained the support of a number of prominent people including leading medical practitioners, members of the police force and the Western Australian Government Railways as well as the local military commandant. At its first meeting on 15 March 1892, a committee was appointed to manage the centre with Jacoby as its secretary. The first order of business was to recruit students for the first aid classes and to send to London for the required teaching materials, although by this time first aid classes had already begun in 1891 under the direction of Dr George McWilliams.⁴

Progress was initially slow and it appears that the main impetus for the growth of the centre in the 1900s and 1910s was the establishment of the ambulance brigade in 1903/1904 by Dr George McWilliams. There was an increase in volunteerism with the foundation of the Brigade and, during this same period, a number of ambulance corps also started. These included the police, the fire brigade and the government railways, the majority of whom had been taught first aid by the St John Association.⁵

¹ Said to have its origins from Hospitallers the Knights of St John, whose order was formed during the First Crusade in Jerusalem, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (established 1831) was the founder of the London St John Ambulance Association. This Association was established during the nineteenth century in England, which saw the increasing professionalism of nursing and the beginnings of such organisations as the Red Cross as well as other charitable groups. It was founded in response to the need for the interim treatment of those injured in industries like mines and factories and in wars, while patients waited for professional care. The main purpose of the Association was to provide public training in first aid. (Howie-Willis, I., *St John, Ambulances and Western Australia 1892 – 1992*, St John Ambulance Australia (WA) Inc, Perth, 1992, pp. 9 – 10.)

² Information in paragraph from Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., pp. 9 – 13.

³ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 13 – 14; St John Ambulance WA (Inc) Annual Report, 1999/2000, p. 24.

⁵ Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., pp. 14 – 35. It should be noted that the St John Ambulance Association and the St John Ambulance Brigade operated separately until July 1989.

The fire brigade had by far the largest ambulance transport service with its first horse drawn carriage purchased as early as January 1903.⁶ In the late 1910s it was decided that the Association would take over the fire brigade ambulance service. This resulted in the need to build a central ambulance station and headquarters for the Western Australian centre. In 1920, land was purchased adjacent to the central fire station building in Murray Street and the first Association building was constructed. The design of the new building incorporated facilities needed to accommodate the four motor ambulances owned by the Association.⁷

By 1937, it was reported that the work of the Association and the transport service had outgrown the facilities at the Murray Street headquarters. The Western Australian Council purchased property (Lot 123 of Perth Town Lot W76) at Wellington Street for the purpose of constructing a new headquarters.⁸ In 1937/1938, the Commissioner of Railways agreed to sell a portion of the land on the western boundary of the site in order to make the land 'more suitable for building purposes'.⁹ (At the time of this land transfer it was found that the land was subject to a proposed road widening, for which the by-law had yet to be promulgated.¹⁰)

J. L. Ochiltree, of the architectural firm of Ochiltree and Hargrave, appears to have been responsible for the preparation of the plans for the new building in his capacity as the Honorary Architect of the St John Ambulance Association. The building was designed to meet the needs of the Association and the St John Ambulance Brigade 'so that all services may be accommodated under the one roof'.¹¹

A building fund appeal was launched in 1937/1838. In 1938, it was reported that £773/7/6 had been raised with major donations coming from Life Member Mr Hubert Lee Steere, the Royal Automobile Club and the Winterbottom Motor Company.¹² In 1939, Perth City Council agreed to waive the balance owing on the purchase of the Wellington Street site (£1,500) thus allowing the Association to obtain the title on the land and subsequently

⁶ Ibid, pp. 34 – 35.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 36 – 39. It is interesting to note that both prior to and after 1920 the St John Ambulance Association is also listed at 120 Aberdeen Street, Perth. This may refer to offices being located at this residence or that the Association's Secretary, R. Campbell, lived at the residence. Campbell's father, Joseph A. Campbell, who owned the property, was an Honorary Associate of the organisation. (*Wise's Post Office Directories*, 1910, 1915, 1920, 1924, 1930, & Battye, J. S., *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, Vol. 1, Hesperian Press, Facsimile Edition, 1985, p. 408, cited in Dr Robyn Taylor, St. John's Ambulance Association, Research Note 1.)

⁸ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1937, p. 9. In 1911, this land had been resumed under the provisions made in Section 15 of the Public Works Act of 1902. Following a land consolidation, the land was later transferred to the St John Ambulance Association. (Information provided to the Heritage Council, 23/11/2001, from a Letter to the City of Perth from Northmore Hale Davy & Leake, 5/12/1978.)

⁹ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1938, p. 8.

¹⁰ Information provided to the Heritage Council, 23/11/2001.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 8. The National Trust Classification Documentation states that the original plans included the use of Donnybrook stone for the façade of the building; however, financial constraints meant that this plan was amended and instead the concrete façade was treated to give the appearance of stone facing. (Art Deco Committee of the NTWA, Classification Documentation, St John Ambulance Australia, February 1997.)

¹² Ibid, p. 8.

financing.¹³ Other local authorities in the area serviced by the Perth centre also committed funds towards the construction of the building. The Lotteries Commission agreed to contribute £3,000 on a £ for £ basis and £950 was also raised by the sale of property in Adelaide Terrace.¹⁴ A total of £10,000 was donated to the building appeal. The balance of the cost of the construction was provided through a loan from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.¹⁵

On 4 August 1939, tenders were first advertised for the construction of *St John Ambulance Building*.¹⁶ The contract was awarded to builder C. W. Arnott on 1 September 1939 at a cost of £16,500.¹⁷

The foundation stone for *St John Ambulance Building* was laid by Lieutenant Governor Hon. Sir James Mitchell KCMC on 29 October 1939. His Excellency also presided at the official opening on 10 June 1940, which was held in the hall of the new building.¹⁸ There was great interest in the new building as indicated by it being opened to the public for a week after the official opening.¹⁹

St John Ambulance Building comprised three stories with various sections. The original plans for the building show general offices, storerooms and what appears to be a first aid shop located in the front section of the building at a ground floor level. To the rear of this was the motor vehicle room with associated rooms for the ambulance service such as a car repair shop, emergency room, a disinfecting room, and living quarters for the ambulance drivers. On the first floor, a boardroom²⁰, a president's room, a classroom and male and female toilets were located in the front section. A large landing provided access to the main hall, which in turn led to a classroom and to the caretaker's quarters. (The caretaker's quarters comprised a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom and a sleep out, and could be accessed from the rear of the building.) At the second floor level, in only the front section, accommodation included the Brigade's room, the Association's room, a library and the students examination room.²¹

By the early 1940s, the eastern states centres had expressed their desire to form a Commandery of the Order in Australia; however, the Western Australian centre was hesitant to join in the federal restructuring of the St John Ambulance Association. After considering the proposal, the Council decided to retain its direct association with London and recommended that two commanderies be established on a geographical basis; one being Western Australia and the second being the Eastern States.²² The eastern states did receive Commandery status, but it was determined that the Western Australia Commandery would be contingent to the promotion of the status

13 It should be noted that portion of the site was resumed for road widening at this time and it has been suggested that the City of Perth may have waived the balance owing as remuneration. (Information provided to the Heritage Council, 23/11/2001.)

14 St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1939, p. 8

15 St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1940, p. 7.

16 *Building and Construction*, 4/8/1939.

17 *Building and Construction*, 1/9/1939.

18 St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1940, p. 7.

19 Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., p. 74.

20 During the site inspection, members of St John Ambulance told the consultants that the board table (still extant) was moved piece by piece into the boardroom via a window where it was then assembled. (Site Inspection, 9/3/2001.)

21 Ochiltree & Hargrave, Plans for the St John Ambulance Association Inc, Drawing No. 2, March 1939. (National Trust of Australia (WA) File: Perth 292.)

22 St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1941, p. 8.

of the Eastern States Commandery to Priory.²³ The Australian Priory was eventually formed in 1946 and, on 23 April 1947, a ceremony was held to celebrate the establishment of the Western Australian Commandery.²⁴

The significant growth of the state after World War Two had an enormous impact of the St John Ambulance Association. The Association developed its services in answer to the dramatic increase in population and the expansion of the metropolitan area. The areas of particularly strong development in the organisation were the volunteer first aid and home nursing brigade, and the ambulance transport service.²⁵

In 1954, the St John Ambulance Association received an endowment of £1,800, which was set aside for the future extensions of the Perth garage. That same year a building to the west of *St John Ambulance Building*, which had been purchased by the organisation in 1947, was demolished for use as a parking area and parade ground for the Brigade.²⁶

A separate single storey building was constructed at the northeast of *St John Ambulance Building* in 1956. The purpose of the building was to accommodate the ambulance vans and provide sleeping quarters for the country drivers while they were in Perth.²⁷ The place was officially opened by J J Holland on 6 September 1956.²⁸

By 1969, there was already recognition that the accommodation at *St John Ambulance Building* could not meet the needs of the growing organisation. In the Annual Report for the year 1969, President J. M. Laudin wrote:

Apart from anything else I believe that the Association is outgrowing these premises. In spite of our policies of decentralisation it seems clear that not only our garage but also our office and classroom accommodation will have to be expanded. If our new President undertakes nothing else, solving that problem should keep him occupied.²⁹

With the growth it had faced in the post war period, in the early 1970s the Association conducted a review of its organisation. This review resulted in a restructuring of the organisation and its management to increase efficiency, to address manpower needs, and to plan for its future development.³⁰ As part of these plans, the construction of a new administration building was proposed.³¹ When the new Belmont Administration Building was opened in 1979, the Association's administration including the training and the ambulance services were relocated to the new building.³² *St John Ambulance Building* continued to be used for some years after as the headquarters for the

²³ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1943, p. 8. Essentially, a priory is a 'national' council/organisation of all St John Ambulance centres and is independent. (St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1999/2000, p. 26.)

²⁴ Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., p. 75.

²⁵ Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., p. 79; St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Reports, 1950 – 1980.

²⁶ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1954, n.p.

²⁷ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1956, n.p.

²⁸ Site Inspection, 9/3/2001.

²⁹ St John Ambulance Association (Inc) Annual Report, 1969, p. 9.

³⁰ St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1978, pp. 9 – 10.

³¹ Ibid, p. 13.

³² St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1979, p. 12; Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., pp. 72 – 73.

Commandery and the Brigade as well as the central city depot for Ambulance transport.³³

The ambulance communications control centre was removed from *St John Ambulance Building* to upgraded facilities at Belmont in 1979/1980.³⁴

In the 1980s, the services of St John Ambulance underwent a period of restructuring Australia wide. In Western Australia, this process was made difficult by the existence of a separate association and a separate brigade. In order to combine the two, much negotiation took place and constitutions were rewritten. The changes came into affect on 1 July 1989. The Commandery was renamed St John Ambulance Australia (WA) Inc with the Brigade becoming the operations branch.³⁵

In 1987/88, the relocation of the central city ambulance depot from *St John Ambulance Building* to East Perth commenced, due primarily to operational difficulties resulting from changes to the traffic management of Wellington Street. This was completed in 1989/1990.³⁶

The library and museum was moved to *St John Ambulance Building* in 1995 and was officially opened on 25 July.³⁷

In 2001, St John Ambulance continue to use the building for various purposes including a retail shop for St John first aid kits and supplies, first aid training, Commandery offices, and the museum and library. Due to accommodation requirements, St John Ambulance plans to move to new premises in the short to medium term.³⁸

As at April 2001, the long term long term viability of *St John Ambulance Building* is not assured, as the St John Ambulance Association intends to dispose of the property. Since the erection of the building the St John Ambulance Association have undergone organisational and operational changes that have had significant effects on the way in which they use their buildings. There are many generously scaled reception rooms and circulation areas that suggest emphasis was given to the more ceremonial side of the Association at the time of the building's design and construction, and these spaces are now difficult to adapt to the current functional requirements of the Association.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Siting

St John Ambulance Building is situated at 298-300 Wellington Street, Perth. The site is on the north side of the street to the immediate east of the intersection with Pier Street. There is a ground level carpark area beside the west side of the building and beyond that a small park, which extends to the Barrack Street railway bridge. The multi-storey Red Cross Building is to the east of the building and a public pathway runs between the north side of the site and the fence enclosing the railway reserve. The south face of the building has a zero

³³ Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., p. 73.

³⁴ St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1979/1980, p. 10.

³⁵ Howie-Willis, I., op. cit., pp. 125 – 129; St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1988/1989, p. 13; St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1989/1990, p. 3.

³⁶ St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1987/1988, p. 3; St John Ambulance Annual Report, 1989/1990, p. 4; see also Information provided to the Heritage Council, 23/11/2001.

³⁷ *The Brigade*, Vol. 18, No. 3, November 1995, pp. 47 & 49, cited in Dr Robyn Taylor, St. John Ambulance Association, Research Note 1.

³⁸ Site Inspection, 9/3/2001.

setback from the Wellington Street footpath, due to road widening. A driveway runs beside the west and east faces of the building and leads to the ambulance parking bay located at ground floor level in the rear half of the building. From this point the building extends for the full width of the site.

External form and style, and details of each of the building

St John Ambulance Building is designed in the Inter-war Art Deco c1913 –1940 style.³⁹

The building is of brick and reinforced concrete construction. All facades of the building apart from the rear facade and the rear half of the east facade are rendered. The render has a slight sand finish and has been lined in the manner of ashlar. A limited range of self-coloured renders has been used on the facade in a way that further enhances the stone-like appearance of the finish. The building is finished to simulate Donnybrook stone in the same manner as the First Church of Christ Scientist. (The St John Ambulance Association have been advised that the render finish has been weathered to the point where it can no longer be maintained.)

The building is strongly modulated in both plan and elevational treatment to accentuate the different zones of use within the building. The modulation is achieved by the use of set backs and projections in plan that are combined with the use of step backs and variations in height for parts of the facade. The strength of the composition comes from the relative simplicity of the massing combined with the unrelieved treatment of all but the front façade.

The roofline of each block, apart from the rear, has a level parapet that contributes to the cubic form of the building. This is characteristic of the Inter-war Art Deco c1913 –1940 style. Each block has a separate corrugated iron gambrel roof contained within the parapetted enclosures. Parapet gutters run around the perimeter of each individual roof. These are served by cast iron rain heads and down pipes mounted on the external face of the building, and there is some evidence that these are functioning in reduced capacity.

The front façade of the building is three storeys high and is symmetrically composed with a central projecting bay rising the equivalent of another storey above the general height of the building. The ornamentation to the exterior of the building is concentrated on this central bay, which is divided vertically by a series of recessive and projecting masonry panels. The bay is enlivened by three projecting panels. The outer two take the form of triangular capped piers that rise up the facade to stop just short of the stylised parapet of the central bay. The central panel contains the windows of the first and second floors and four masonry ribs that run from the head of the first floor window up to parapet level. A single flagpole stands on top of the central bay. The two bays that stand at either side of the central bay each contain three windows at first, second and third floor levels. Visually the windows are combined vertically by being contained within moulded render surrounds that rise through the height of the facade. Below the first floor window of the central bay are set in letters the words 'The St. John Ambulance Association'. In the space between the head of the first floor window and the sill of the second floor window is set the insignia of 'The St. John Ambulance Association'.

On either side of the main entrance to the building stands a pair of stylised engaged columns that appear to support the concrete canopy running across the full width of the front façade. This cantilevered canopy extends beyond

³⁹ Apperly, et. al., op. cit..

the line of the building by approximately one metre and its edge is decorated with horizontal moulding. The front façade has a grey coloured terrazzo plinth between ground and windowsill level. The plinth comprises a slight thickening of the wall with a top that steps back to become flush with the face of the render of the facade.

With *St John Ambulance Building* there is a strong correlation between the planning of the building and the external massing. As a result the building can be read as a series of blocks and in the description of the building it was thought that it would be helpful if it was described in this way.

The west and east facades of *St John Ambulance Building* most clearly show the way in which the building has been modulated to reflect the functioning of the interior. The front block is three storeys high; the second and third blocks are both two storeys. There is, however, a substantial difference in height between the two two-storey blocks caused by the greater ceiling height of the hall on the first floor of the third block. The fourth block is also two storeys high but is only slightly higher than the second block. The fifth (rear) block houses the caretaker's flat. This is the only block that is not enclosed by parapet walls, having instead a timber construction perimeter verandah.

Generally the windows throughout are timber framed multi-paned double hung sash type. The windows in the front block are similar to the typical window but include an additional awning sash. The exceptions are the toilets and the caretaker's flat. The toilet windows are considerably smaller single-paned sashes and those to the caretaker's flat are multi-paned casements.

Internal layout and details

St John Ambulance Building is a simply and generously planned building with the disposition and size of the rooms seeming to owe a great deal to the required massing of the exterior of the building. This can be demonstrated by the planning of the front block of the building where, on each level, there are three rooms: a central circulation core containing the stairs and lift and one large room on either side. The planning of the whole building is arranged around the circulation core, as this is the main means of reaching all levels of all parts of the building.

The finishes to the walls, floors and ceilings of all rooms in the building are very consistent. The only variations being between the walls in the caretaker's flat and the rest of the building. There is also some variation in the decorative detailing of the ceilings. Typically the rooms have painted plaster walls, the lower part of which is rendered with a slight sand finish and lined to give the appearance of ashlar. Floors are of timber fitted with carpet. The ceilings are of plaster edged at the perimeter by a series of stepped bands decorated on the leading edge by a variety of motifs. The doors, architraves and skirtings are of varnished jarrah. The door openings are lined with a jarrah casing which includes a glazed fanlight. The glass to the door leafs and fanlights are decorated with an acid etched pattern. Doors are single panel with the panel being of either clear or obscure glass or of timber. Skirtings have splayed tops; the architraves are simply moulded and have architrave and plinth blocks.

Ground Floor

The main entry to the building is within the central bay of the front façade. The entrance is fitted with a roller shutter screen, which leads to an entrance enclosure that projects into the entrance hall. The enclosure is of timber framed glazing with a coloured terrazzo floor and no ceiling. Double doors

lead from the east and west sides of the lobby into the entrance hall. The entrance Hall is the antechamber to the rooms entered from the east and west sides. A divided staircase rises from the north side of the entrance hall. A masonry enclosed lift shaft is located on the axis of the main door between the two flights of the staircase. There is a plaster bas-relief of the insignia of 'The St. John Ambulance Association' above the lift door.

The large room off the west side of the entrance hall now serves as a museum for the 'The St. John Ambulance Association'. The room is filled with freestanding timber framed display cases and the walls are lined by framed pictures hung from moulded plaster picture rails. The lights are pendent fittings with white glass diffusers.

The room to the east of the entrance hall is the same size as the museum. The room is used as a shop for the 'The St. John Ambulance Association' and has been fitted out using demountable partitioning to suit this purpose.

Documentary Evidence shows that the rooms that now serve as the museum and shop had originally been fitted with counters. These were located just beyond their entrance doors. These counters have been removed.

The second block of the building abuts the north wall of the museum and the shop. The block contains two large offices, which overlook the ambulance bay that occupies the ground floor of the third block. At this level the ambulance bay effectively separates the front of the building from the rear. The third room is a small room that used to serve as the control room for the ambulances and opens onto the ambulance bay.

The ambulance bay is in effect a covered parking area with a bitumenised floor and a ceiling formed by the structure and soffit of the floor to the hall that sits above it. Maintenance work has been carried out to the floor of the ambulance bay over the years in attempts to remediate a subsistence problem.

First Floor

The divided staircase rises from the ground floor entrance hall to meet at the half landing behind the lift shaft. The staircase then continues in a northerly direction as a single flight. It opens into the foyer that occupies the central part of the second block of the building at first floor level. The foyer is flanked on the east and west sides by the female and male cloakrooms respectively. The cloakrooms have lower ceiling heights than the foyer area allowing them to be lit by four square-shaped windows set above the inner walls of the cloakrooms.

Two sets of double doors lead from the north side of the foyer to the hall that fully occupies the first floor of the third block of the building. A corridor leads off the south side of the foyer, runs past the west side of the staircase and serves the front part of the building. A single flight of stairs rises to the second floor of the front part of the building. It is located against the east side of the stairs from the ground floor.

The boardroom is in the southwest corner of the building and is the same size as the museum directly below. The boardroom is entered off the corridor, which continues past it to join the lift lobby. A classroom directly above the ground floor shop is entered from the corridor/lift lobby. The boardroom contains a very large timber table (7m x 2m).

The hall has a raised stage at the east end. The walls of the room are divided into bays by pilasters that are decorated with an incised pattern. The ceiling is stepped as elsewhere and decorated with the same scalloped motif as in the

foyer. A decorated plaster band projects below the level of the central part of the ceiling and runs for the full length of the room. It then turns down the face of the arch above the stage and continues across the area of the stage. It could not be determined whether this element was purely decorative or if it fulfilled a utilitarian purpose. Fans and suspended fluorescent light fittings are suspended from the ceiling. The light fittings are replacements of the original incandescent fittings with white glass diffusers.

There are three sets of doors in the north wall of the hall. The western door serves the room that occupies the north west corner of the building. This room, formerly a classroom, is now fitted out as a kitchen. The central double doors are half glazed and surrounded by glazed sidelights and fanlights. This door serves as the fire escape from the hall, providing direct access to the rear verandah. A steel fire escape staircase, which appears to be a replacement of an earlier timber stair, descends from the verandah⁴⁰. The third door from the hall leads to the caretaker's flat, which occupies the north east corner of the building. The flat can also be entered from the verandah.

The flat consists of seven rooms including a bathroom, wc and kitchen. The rooms are arranged on each side of an 'L' shaped corridor that runs through the flat from the rear verandah of the building. Typically the rooms are smooth plastered for their full height, ceilings and joinery are similar to other parts of the building. The kitchen walls are plastered with a hardwall dado to the lower half. The ceiling is of battened sheeting. The kitchen cabinetwork appears to be original.

Second floor

The stair arrives at the lift lobby. The lobby continues to form an 'L' shaped corridor that returns to serve the rooms on the west and north sides of the block. There are classrooms on the east and west sides of the block a small tea-room occupies the centre of the south side. The small room at the centre of the north side of the building, which had been a committee room, is now used for the cleaning and preparation of equipment for planning. The lift has what appears to be its original sliding door with vision panel. A jarrah ladder is mounted on the wall of the corridor to provide access to the roof level lift motor room.

Subsequent alterations

Since its construction in 1940, there appear to have been very few alterations to *St John Ambulance Building*. Major works have been the installation of a kitchen in the rear classroom on the first floor, the conversion of the former library of the second floor into a small tearoom, and the construction of a carport and new steel fire escape at the rear of the building. Repairs such as the concreting and bitumenising the garage floor, and the installation of new plumbing have also occurred.⁴¹

St John Ambulance Building remains remarkably intact. The changes in use to some parts of the building have resulted in only minimal alteration of the building fabric.

Appearance and condition of the building to date

⁴⁰ Correspondence from Des Franklin, on HCWA file P2132, suggests the timber stairs may have been removed in the late 1980s.

⁴¹ Site Inspection, 9/3/2001. No information has been found to confirm the precise nature and timing of all changes to *St John Ambulance Building*. This is an area of further research.

St John Ambulance Building has benefited from a regular and conscientiously carried out programme of maintenance throughout its existence. The interior of the building is in a good condition apart from a few isolated areas on the first floor ceiling where there is evidence of damp. The exterior is generally in a sound condition. It is, however, apparent that some areas of the external fabric are in a poor condition mainly as a result of constructional defects. These include the exfoliation of the concrete from the reinforced concrete beam above the entry to the ambulance bay; the cracking of render particularly on the west façade in the area of the plumbing pipework and dampness problems resulting from failures of the parapet guttering. Large areas of fine crazing are evident to the render of the façade and also to the terrazzo of the plinth on the front façade. There is also evidence of subsidence of the sub-base of the ambulance bay, for which a number of works have attempted to repair in the past.

The owner's representative also reported that there have been continuing problems with the plumbing mainly caused by corrosion of the original pipework. Problems with discharge of the rainwater from the roof and storm water drainage were also reported and this seems to be a result of the system having insufficient capacity to cope with heavy downpours.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Documentary evidence indicates that architect J. L. Ochiltree designed *St John Ambulance Building* in his role as the Honorary Architect for the St John Ambulance Association, and the building can be definitely attributed to the architectural firm of Ochiltree and Hargrave.⁴²

Jack Learmonth Ochiltree was born and educated in Melbourne. It was in Melbourne that he was articled as an architect before arriving in Western Australia by 1894. Ochiltree worked for several years as a draftsman for the Public Works Department but by 1897 he had entered into private architectural practice.⁴³ He has been attributed to the design of a number of residences located throughout the metropolitan area as well as several homestead residences near Geraldton.⁴⁴ He was also commissioned by the Western Australian Fire Brigade Board to prepare plans for a number of fire stations: the alterations to Perth (1914); Claremont (1914); Bunbury (1915); Leederville (1926); and, Collie (1929).⁴⁵ Other buildings designed by Ochiltree include Bayswater Municipal Office (1914), electric substations, Perth (1915), and the Wellington Hotel in Bunbury.⁴⁶

A comparative example of an art deco building in form and scale to that of *St John Ambulance Building* is the First Church of Christ Scientist constructed in St George's Terrace in 1939. Ochiltree and Hargrave were also responsible for the design of this building, which at the time of its construction was hailed as the modern trend in church design. Like *St John Ambulance Building*, the exterior treatment of the First Church of Christ Scientist is imitation stone

⁴² St John Ambulance Association Western Australia Inc Annual Report, 1938, p. 8.

⁴³ Kelly, I., 'Architectural Biography 1890 - 1915', research undertaken for the degree of Master of Architecture, UWA, 1991, n.p.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ 'Thematic History of Fire Brigades in Western Australia', prepared by CAMS for the Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia, August 1996, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Kelly, I., op. cit.; Pitt Morison, M., 'Immigrant Architects in Western Australia 1885 - 1905', unpublished, 1983, n.p.

stucco. The First Church of Christ Scientist was constructed by A. T. Brine & Sons Ltd at a cost of £9,776/0/0.⁴⁷

St John Ambulance Building is a rare example, in Perth, of a building clearly displaying many of the defining characteristics of the Inter-War Art Deco c. 1915 – c.1940 style⁴⁸. Other large buildings in style and scale to as *St John Ambulance Building* and the First Church of Christ Scientist in the Perth metropolitan area were often commercial premises. Comparative examples include: Newspaper House designed by Hobbs, Smith and Forbes architects and constructed in 1932; and *W D & H O Wills* built in 1927 under the direction of architectural firm Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown in the Inter-War Chicagoesque style.⁴⁹

While other ‘pure’ examples of the Inter-War Art Deco style such as the Regal Theatre (1936-37), the Piccadilly Theatre (c1936) and possibly Sherwood Court (1937) do exist, they are not typical. It seems that in Perth a hybrid form of the style evolved. This is probably best demonstrated by a study of the many houses by William G Bennett, possibly the key exponent of the Art Deco style, in Perth, between the two world wars. An underlying characteristic of the style employed by this firm was the way in which these contemporary styles were integrated with elements of more conservative standard planning and building construction from the period. This can be demonstrated in the way Bennett buildings rarely concealed their main areas roofs behind parapets instead the roofs were usually standard construction hipped and the use of flat or parapetted roofs was limited to balconies and entrances. There is a feeling with Bennett buildings that there was a definite hierarchy of importance given to the facades of a building and rooms within it. This was reflected in the way in which the greatest design attention seems to have been focussed on the main facade, and the main reception rooms of a building.

13.4 REFERENCES

Howie-Willis, I., *St John, Ambulances and Western Australia 1892 – 1992*, St John Ambulance Australia (WA) Inc, Perth, 1992.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

No information has been found to confirm the precise nature and timing of all changes to *St John Ambulance Building*. Further research could be done in the building application files held by the City of Perth.

Further investigation of the development design of both *St John Ambulance Building* and the First Church of Christ Scientist may be of interest for comparative analysis purposes at a later date.

⁴⁷ *Building and Construction*, 28/4/1939; *Building and Construction*, 30/6/1939.

⁴⁸ Apperly, et. al., op. cit..

⁴⁹ Information from HCWA Database.