



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The Post Office is a fine example of the type of small scale public building built during the early decades of the twentieth century in the Federation Free style. The Post Office Residence (fmr) is a good example of the the Federation Bungalow style. Both buildings were designed by Hillson Beasley, the Chief Government Architect from 1905 to 1916. (Criterion 1.1)

The Post Office is a landmark on a prominent corner in the Merredin town centre. It is integral in the town's commercial and retail precinct and contributes to the townscape and character of Merredin. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The establishment of dedicated postal facilities reflects the growth and importance of the Merredin locality in the early decades of the twentieth century, as a result of the operation of the Eastern Goldfields Railway and the associated development of the central eastern wheatbelt district of Western Australia (Criterion 2.1)

The additions to the Post Office building are representative of the growth of Merredin during the 1920s and the 1960s. (Criterion 2.2)

The Post Office and Residence (fmr) were designed by Chief Architect, Hillson Beasley. The place is also associated with the postal employees who worked in the Post Office and lived in the Residence. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Merredin Post Office Group, particularly the Post Office, is valued by the community for its service to the public and as a point of social contact from 1913. (Criterion 4.1)

* 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*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

The Post Office and the Post Office Residence (fmr) contribute to the town and surrounding agricultural community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Merredin Post Office Group is typical of regional town post office locations being opposite the railway station and on the junction of the two main streets in the town. The Post Office and Post Office Residence (fmr) are examples of Federation Free and Federation Bungalow style designs of Government architect, Hillson Beasley. (Criterion 6.1)

Merredin Post Office Group is a representative example of the development of postal and telecommunication services and associated facilities on the same site since 1913. The L.L.E. Building (fmr) is representative of a World War Two construction and is associated with the development of the telecommunication facilities on the site. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

The Post Office and Post Office Residence (fmr) are in good condition. The L.L.E. Building (fmr) is in poor condition as no maintenance has been carried out since the building was vacated in 1967.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The Post Office operated continuously as a postal and telecommunication facility until 1967, after which time it has continued to operate as a postal facility. The place has retained a moderate to high degree of integrity.

The Post Office Residence (fmr) were constructed for the Post Master in association with the establishment of the Post Office, and was a residence until 1990, when it was converted to commercial offices with minimal changes taking place. It has retained a moderate degree of integrity.

The L.L.E. Building (fmr) was purpose built c. 1943, to support the telecommunications at the telephone exchange housed in the Post Office. It ceased that function in 1967, after 24 years of operation, and has been vacant since. The place has a low degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Merredin Post Office Group shows evidence of several periods of development with changes to the external material and extensions. The changes have reduced the degree of authenticity to a moderate level.

The Post Office building has had the most extensive additions, alterations and internal changes, and has a moderate degree of authenticity. The Post Office Residence (fmr) has retained a moderate degree of authenticity despite some alterations. The L.L.E. Building (fmr) has had minimal intervention to the fabric except for the addition of the engine room c. 1954, and has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Merredin Post Office Group comprises the Post Office (1913, 1925, 1965, 1995), a single-storey brick and iron building constructed in Federation Free Style; former Post Office Residence (1913, 1922, 1990), a single-storey brick and iron residence constructed in Federation Bungalow Style; and former Telephone Line Equipment (L.L.E.) Building (c. 1943, c. 1954), a utilitarian structure of concrete block and iron construction.¹

Sandalwood cutters worked in the Merredin district in the 1880s and 1890s. Their tracks criss-crossed the district between the granite outcrops that dotted the area. The rocks acted as water catchments, providing a reliable source of water at a shallow depth with good grass for horse feed. Pastoralists also took up leases in the district around the same time.²

With the discovery of gold in the Southern Cross and Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie areas transport to and from the district was required. The Eastern Railway, which had been constructed as far as Northam in 1886, was extended to Southern Cross in 1894, and reached Kalgoorlie in 1897. The Northam-Kalgoorlie section was known as the Eastern Goldfields Railway.³ The siding at Merredin was about 4 km south of Hunt's Dam, a small settlement with a wayside inn, on the York-Southern Cross road. With the opening of the railway, the inn was abandoned and the settlement moved to the siding. A townsite was surveyed in 1904.

Situated about halfway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, Merredin was the ideal site for coal and locomotive depots on the Eastern Goldfields line. The opening of the railway loop line to Dowerin in 1911, the Bruce Rock-Quairading-York line in 1913, the Bruce Rock-Corrigin-Narrogin line in 1914, and the Narrogin-Narembeen line in 1923, made Merredin a major railway junction. As well as servicing the goldfields, the railway opened up the district for settlers on the land. Branch lines were constructed into the new wheat growing areas to provide better transport for farm produce and supplies.⁴

The first post office service at Merredin was under the control of West Australian Government Railways and the Station Master acted as Post Master. In November 1910, George Duggan took over as Post Master, operating the postal service from his grocery store in Bates Street. Duggan had been a post office official at Wiluna some years earlier before retiring from the position. He was paid £160 a year for his post office work.⁵

¹ Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Style and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1989, pp. 136-139.

² Ewers, John K. *Bruce Rock: The Story of a District*, Bruce Rock District Road Board, 1959, pp. 10-13.

³ *West Australian Yearbook*, Perth, 1894, p. 78.

⁴ Stannage, C. T. (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, Perth, UWA Press, 1981, p. 250.

⁵ Merredin Post Office file K273/44 1911/2.

A revue by the Post Master General's Department in July 1911, found that postal revenue from Merredin was growing, and was estimated to keep on growing with the completion of local railway connections. A dedicated post office building in Merredin was clearly warranted. The Commonwealth proceeded to acquire, from the Government of Western Australia, the land which had been reserved in the town plan for post office purposes. After the obligatory wrangling, the matter was finalised in August 1912, with the resumption by the Commonwealth of Lot 27, on the corner of Barrack and Bate streets, and the payment of £150 in compensation to the State.⁶

In September 1912, George Duggan tendered his resignation, stating that he had too much work to do in his grocery store. He constructed a two-room wood and iron building beside his store and leased it to the Post Master General's Department for £78 a year for use as a post office until a permanent building was constructed. The temporary building took three weeks to complete, and Merredin's first official post office opened on 1 November 1912, with Albert Iver Drake as Senior Postal Assistant in Charge.⁷

Tenders were called for a permanent post office building and residence, and John Park won the work with a quote of £2,445-7-0.⁸ Park had already worked on other post office buildings, being responsible for the additions to Narrogin and Katanning post offices in 1912. The design of the Post Office was approved by Western Australian Public Works Department architect, Hillson Beasley. Beasley was the third of the four chief Government architects employed by the Western Australian Public Works Department between 1885 and 1925, when that department was responsible for the design and construction of the State's post offices. In 1926, responsibility for this work passed to the Commonwealth Post Master General's Department.⁹

The Post Office opened on 30 July 1913, with Albert Drake as Post Master.

The postal business of the town is now being carried on at the new Post Office ... The new premises are roomy and spacious ... [and] will be highly appreciated by the residents of the town and district.¹⁰

The Post Office Residence appears to have been available only to a married Post Master because when Albert Drake announced his engagement to marry a local girl it was reported that he was 'evidently bent on qualifying for occupation of the very commodious quarters erected at the new post office.'¹¹ The Post Office Residence was sited behind the Post Office and fronting Bates Street.¹² In 1922, a contract for work on the Post Office Residence, valued at £1,338-15-6, was awarded to T. J. Green. However it is unclear what work was carried out at this time.¹³

⁶ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 17 August 1912; Merredin Post Office file K273/44 1911/2.

⁷ Merredin Post Office file K1 Box 33/701/12 Part 2.

⁸ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 14 Feb 1913, p. 392.

⁹ Pope, B. et al. *Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia*, National Trust & National Estate, 1993, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Merredin Mercury*, 6 August 1913, p. 2.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Merredin Post Office Site plan, 29 May 1935.

¹³ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 15 December 1922, p. 2299; PWD Plan 3683/19, 16 September 1912, corrected 24 January 1920. The PWD plan complies with the building as it stands. The 1920 'correction' date however, suggests that there may have been some

Merredin developed rapidly after World War One. The agricultural area grew, encouraged by Government policies on land settlement, and the railway activity grew in keeping with the land development. In 1925, extensions were added to the Post Office by A. J. Pike, at a cost of £1,247-5-0.¹⁴ The extension, approved by PWD architect W. B. Hardwick, increased the size of the Post Office by more than 50%. The extension was in keeping with the original style of the place and gave the Post Office a wider frontage to Barrack Street.¹⁵

During World War Two, Merredin was the site of the RAAF No. 10 Stores Depot and the home of hundreds of airforce personnel. When Australian Forces returned from the Middle East, the First Australian General Hospital was housed in temporary accommodation east of the town. It was during this period that the Telephone Line Equipment (L.L.E.) Building was constructed.¹⁶ Although commonly referred to as the telephone exchange, the L.L.E. building housed line equipment and provided office space for line technicians. The exchange was situated in the Post Office.

In the 1960s, a mineral boom, and the building of the standard gauge line through the town, brought an increase in business activity. In 1965, the staff at the Post Office consisted of a Post Master, three Postal Clerks and four Postal Officers. That year, more additions were made to the Post Office, providing a new porch, a staff tea room, and a larger mail room. The existing porch was enclosed to create more public space. The extension increased the Barrack Street frontage of the Post Office by 12 feet (3.7m). The work was carried out by local builder Dennis Murphy, at a cost of \$16,700.¹⁷

Stage two of the alterations required the telephone exchange area of the Post Office to be refurbished as the Post Master's office. This could not be done until 1967, when the telephone exchange was moved into a new two-storey telephone exchange and trunk line equipment building which was constructed on another site on Barrack Street.¹⁸ The L.L.E. Building was vacated at this time.

In 1988, Lot 27 was subdivided into Lots 101 and 102. The Post Office was situated on the corner site of Lot 102, and remained the property of the Post Master General's Department. The Post Office Residence and the former L.L.E. Building, situated on Lot 101 which fronts Bates Street, were transferred to the ownership of the Shire of Merredin.¹⁹

The former L.L.E. Building has been empty since 1967, and is subject to a redevelopment plan which will see it demolished. The Post Master occupied the Post Office Residence until 1990, when the place was refurbished as offices

change to the plan, and therefore the building, although what this change was is not indicated. Physical inspection did not reveal any additions to the place. No mention of either the tender, or work being carried out, was found in the *Merredin Mercury*.

¹⁴ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 26 June 1925, p. 1194.

¹⁵ PWD Plan 23937, 18 May 1925.

¹⁶ Merredin Post Office site plan, PMG drawing BBW1120A, 1949-1960.

¹⁷ Merredin Post Office file PG 552, 'PO Extensions'; PWD Plan File 64/453, 17 February 1965.

¹⁸ Merredin Post Office file PG 552, op cit.

¹⁹ DOLA Diagram 74773, 21 October 1988; Certificate of Title Vol. 1843 Fol. 928, HCWA File 1578/1566.

and leased out.²⁰ The Post Office was converted into a Post Shop in 1995, and continues to serve this function.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Merredin Post Office Group is located in Barrack Street Merredin, on the corner of Bates Street. It is a prominent position, being on the corner of the two commercial and retail streets in the town, and located directly opposite the railway station.

The Post Office (1913) is freestanding on the corner site and abuts the street boundary on both street frontages. Although the building is located on a prime corner, it only addresses the Barrack Street frontage. The former Post Office Residence (1913) is situated immediately behind the Post Office, in Bates Street. The former L.L.E. Building (c. 1943) is situated behind the Post Office Residence and the Post Office. The Post Office makes a contribution to the Barrack Street streetscape and the townscape of Merredin, and is a landmark in the town.

The Post Office displays characteristics of the Federation Free style, as described in Apperly.²¹ Hillson Beasley, the Government Architect at the time of construction of the Post Office, was a noted practitioner of the Federation Free style. The characteristics of the style appropriate to this place include: non-residential function, eclectic combination of details, no overall representation of a past style, honesty of materials, desire for originality, and the preference for asymmetry. The construction of the Post Office building is typical of the period, with traditional brick load bearing walls, and timber floor and roof construction.

The single-storey Post Office is a brick construction. The original face brick and horizontal banded panels of recessed brickwork on the pilasters have been painted. The roof is a gambrel hipped roof with boxed eaves. It has a pitch at approximately 30 degrees, and is clad with short length sheets of corrugated iron. The gambrels on the roof are vented. Located each side of the Barrack Street main frontage, are parapeted verandahs with low pitched concealed roofs.

The Barrack Street frontage is asymmetrical but balanced by the rhythm and regularity of the arched openings. Decorative headers are still evident in all the arched openings and windows, which have label moulds around the arches. The former street corner entry has been blocked by infilling the arches with windows. The same treatment has been carried out to two arches west of the central Barrack Street frontage.

The Bates Street frontage is of a domestic nature. There is a window, a door that is blocked off and services which are located at the north east corner of the building. A skillion suspended roof is secured over the door, which is set in an archway. This roof is fixed asymmetrically with the arch and cuts across the arch above the doorway. The main view from Bates Street takes in the rear elevation of the building, looking south. The rear elevation comprises a skillion enclosed verandah housing toilet and sundry facilities. A new brick

²⁰ Lynton Thomas, telephone conversation with Irene Sauman, 4 August 1998, Memo, HCWA File 1566/1578.

²¹ Apperly, R. op cit.

construction along the west boundary of the site houses the private mail boxes. This structure has a verandah along its eastern side.

The Post Office has undergone a number of extensions, and internal and external changes to accommodate the continuous development of the postal services and facilities on the site. The original Post Office building comprised two main rooms at the east end of the existing building, and the gable feature on the west end frontage of the building above the main front window. The first extension to the Post Office was carried out in 1925. This addition was done in keeping with the original style and extended the building on the west side. The central spire was added at that time. In 1965, another extension was made along the west side. This latter change did not respond to the existing building in terms of roof structure (skillion), but did have a street front arch to match the existing arches.

Little remains of the original interior of the building to indicate the original fabric, fittings or fixtures. The plans indicate that the telephone exchange was located on the east section of the building along the Bates Street frontage. Despite alterations and additions to the post office over the years, the exchange continued to operate from that position until 1967 when it was moved to another building off site.

Entry into the Post Office is gained via the western most arch of the Barrack Street frontage. The entry is signalled by a long concrete ramp with steel pipe railings. The aluminium framed entry doors which have long since replaced the original doors, are located within the foyer space. In the public space, the Post Office has been fitted out in Australia Post corporate fittings. The only remaining internal evidence of the original post office is the structural walls and the arched windows and former openings. Throughout the building suspended ceilings are in place. The original walls have double incised dado lines and have been painted.

A counter runs parallel with the Barrack Street frontage. Behind the counter a door opens into a store room. This was the original entry on the corner of the building. To the left of the store room is the former telephone exchange which is now an office. On the left is a long corridor, formed by the partition wall at the back of the public space and the original back wall of the building. Along the north side of the corridor are the toilet facilities and service areas, under a raked skillion ceiling. The long corridor connects both ends of the building, behind the public space. At the western end is the mail sorting room and staff room which made up the 1965 extension to the place. The mail sorting room opens outside on the western facade, and also opens into a counter area on the left of the main entry doors in the public space.

The Post Office is in good condition. The place has undergone two major extensions and several internal alterations, and has a low degree of authenticity. It has retained a moderate to high degree of integrity due to the continuous development of its function as a post office facility, however the altered access to the Post Office interferes with the understanding of the place.

The former Post Office Residence is located in Bates Street, immediately behind the Post Office. It is a freestanding residential building, set back from the street frontage. The residential nature of the former Post Office Residence contrasts with the commercial buildings in the heart of Bates Street.

The plans, dated 1912, clearly show the frontage of the former Post Office Residence as the south elevation, which faces the back of the Post Office, and the Bates Street elevation is the side of the building. This explains the existing inappropriate street elevation.

The former Post Office Residence displays characteristics of the Federation Bungalow style as described in Apperly.²² Some of the characteristics of the style which are appropriate to the place include: ground hugging single storey residential, unpretentious with an honesty of materials, and verandahs with simple timber posts. The construction is typical of the period, with traditional brick load bearing walls, and timber floor and roof construction.

The single-storey building is a red face brick construction, with a rendered foundation and a rendered cornice band around the top of the brickwork. The roof is a gambrel hipped roof with feature gables on the south and east elevations. The roof has a pitch of approximately 30 degrees, and is clad with short sheets of corrugated iron. The gambrels on the roof are vented. The gable infills are roughcast with smooth rendered geometric patterned infills. The verandahs around the south east and north east corners have skillion roofs hipped at the corners, and separate from the main roof.

The street frontage is asymmetrical. The external appearance of the place has remained mostly unchanged except for the enclosure of the north east verandahs. The front and south side verandah has had the timber floor removed and replaced with concrete. The timber verandah posts have been replaced by 75mm (3 inch) diameter steel posts. Timber framed double hung windows are still evident throughout, except in the kitchen. An air conditioner has been installed through the front (east) wall. The north east verandah enclosure is clad with horizontal 'hardiplank' cladding and aluminium framed sliding windows. A timber framed and weatherboard clad toilet has been added on the north side under a skillion roof extended from the verandah.

The former Post Office Residence has undergone internal renovations in recent years to accommodate a change in use from residential to commercial office space. The room layout of the building has remained unchanged.

The internal plaster walls are undecorated except for the front main room which has a picture rail. The ceilings are undecorated plaster sheeting. The original doors remain in situ throughout. The fireplaces are boarded over and there is no evidence of original lighting or switch fittings. The original front door has been blocked off and a new entry door has been inserted in the east wall of the living room in the space formerly occupied by a window. The living room now functions as a reception area. The kitchen has been completely refitted with modern facilities, and the original double hung window has been replaced with a wide aluminium framed sliding glass window. The former laundry is now a storeroom, and the north verandah has been enclosed. The former bedrooms function as offices.

The former Post Office Residence is in good condition. The alterations are for the most part reversible. The place has a moderate to high degree of authenticity and has retained a moderate degree of integrity.

²² ibid.

The former L.L.E. Building is located only two metres from the rear of the former Post Office Residence and encroaches on the setting of the place. The building is located on the north boundary of the lot and immediately behind the Post Office. The 'front' of the former L.L.E. Building can be seen from Barrack Street, between the west side of the Post Office and the private mail box structure.

The former L.L.E. Building is a cement block construction on a concrete floor, with a timber framed gable roof clad with short sheets of corrugated iron sheeting. The building forms an 'L' shape. The engine room, added c. 1954, is within the 'L'. The layout of the building has remained unchanged since construction with no apparent alterations taking place except the addition of the engine room.

The entry is on the south at the rear of the Post Office. To the left of the entry are two offices. The kitchen is straight ahead. The door to the right opens into the main communications area, which forms part of the long leg of the 'L'. At the northern end of the communication room is a timber framed and fixed glass partition wall forming another space. A door from this space leads into another room at the northern end of the building. This room has a loft space and accesses the west exterior of the building and the engine room.

Telecommunication leads dangle from the ceiling in the communications room and the partitioned space. The ceilings in the communication area and the northern room are of Masonite sheets with battened joins, painted with high gloss paint. The sheets are buckled throughout. The ceilings in the office area are plaster board. The kitchen fixtures are original. There are three cupboards under the kitchen sink. The kitchen has a double hung window above the sink and a panelled door with an obscure glazed panel, similar to the front double entry doors.

The walls of the place are hard plaster with a double incised dado line around the perimeter. The windows throughout the building are timber framed double hung with 12 panel panes. They are in poor condition with weathering of the timber frames evident. The glass panes shows evidence of having been painted.

The former L.L.E. Building has been vacant since 1967, and the poor condition of the place indicates the lack of maintenance and the opportunities for vandalism. Graffiti is evident throughout the building, as are broken panes of glass. The roof sheets are lifting and rusted in places. The gutters that remain are useless, and there is no provision for drainage off the site. The walls have cracks in a number of places. From a visual inspection, the cracks do not seem to impinge on the structural stability of the place.

The integrity of the building is low due to the lack of use of the place and the inability for it to be of any use as a postal or communication facility. The place has a high degree of authenticity, with minimal changes taking place since it was constructed.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH
