



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES- ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Toodyay Post Office and Residence is fine example of a modest size civic building in Federation Arts and Crafts Style in a growing country centre at the turn of the century. (Criterion 1.2)

The building is a landmark within the streetscape. (Criterion 1.3)

The building makes an important contribution to the townscape of Toodyay. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Toodyay Post Office and Residence is significant in its association with the development of the town and its link to the town's former name of Newcastle. The building demonstrates the importance to Government of providing services and vital links to growing regional centres and the expanding goldfields and rural districts beyond. (Criterion 2.2)

The building has historic significance in its association with George Temple Poole, an important Public Works architect in Western Australia in the latter part of the 1800s. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The building has social value for its role in postal and communication services important to the social and business activities of the community. (Criterion 4.1)

Toodyay Post Office and Residence contributes to the community's sense of place as the location for public activity within the townscape. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Toodyay Post Office and Residence is a rare example of Federation Arts & Crafts Style of George Temple Poole's public buildings of the period, many of which have been demolished. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The building is representative of the civic statue of public architecture in rural centres. (Criterion 6.1)

The building represents the provision of postal services to country towns by governments and the living conditions of Postmasters and their families. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The overall condition of the building fabric is sound, other than some minor cracking and fretting of brickwork in several places. The building has withstood major earthquake damage which has taken its toll on some older buildings throughout the district.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Some minor alterations to the interior have occurred, in the relocation of public letterboxes and the original telegraph and telephone services and minor alterations to the kitchen and dining room of the Postmaster's residence. Overall, the integrity of the building has not suffered and therefore retains a high degree of integrity. Current, proposed works would substantially correct the former intervention by restoring the brick wall in which the post boxes are located.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Some alteration and relocation to the building's facilities have been made; however, the building is substantially intact and therefore retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The following is based largely on the Heritage Assessment by Bruce Callow and Associates for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, 1994.

Toodyay Post Office and Residence was built in 1897, on the south west corner of Stirling Terrace and Duke Street. As far as can be ascertained it was the first Post Office on that site; although postal services existed in the locality since 1842.³²

³² Pope, B., Bush, F., Broomfield, W., & Kelsall, D., Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia owned by Australia Post, (for the National Trust of

The Avon Valley town of Toodyay, whose name is thought to be derived from the Aboriginal term Duidgee,³³ encompasses two previously separate but adjacent settlements of 'Old' Toodyay (1836) and Newcastle (1860). The present Post Office's antecedents were originally located in houses in Old Toodyay, with Postmasters or mistresses fulfilling the position in conjunction with other roles such as storekeeper or Clerk of Courts.³⁴

Old Toodyay town was subject to intermittent but severe flooding in 1847, 1849, 1857, 1859, and 1862.³⁵ To avoid the problem of the severe flooding, the new town of Newcastle was proclaimed on October, 1860.³⁶ A post office may have operated from the Convict Depot at Newcastle from 1851.³⁷ However, the official building of a Post and Telegraph Office on the north west corner of Fiennes and Clinton Street, Newcastle (now the site of a childrens' playground opposite the Shire Offices), appears to have been built in 1861 or 1862. For a short period of time, two post offices operated simultaneously until the Old Toodyay Post office closed in October, 1864.³⁸

The prosperity of Newcastle town and the Toodyay district relied on the income generated from various agricultural and pastoral industries including, wool, wheat, viticulture, sandalwood and horses. By the late 1880s, these industries were in decline, and rival Avon Valley towns, York and Northam, emerged as preferred centres of development. In the early 1890s, the opening of the Goldfields in the Yilgarn temporarily enhanced Newcastle's situation and the renewed prosperity. A perceived need to keep up with York were behind calls to replace inadequate public buildings.³⁹ The existing post office in the old Convict Buildings was described as being 'in a dangerous condition, the foundations have gone bung and the walls have to be strutted back to hold them up.'⁴⁰

After years of discussion, a site was secured and on 23 March, 1897, the tender price of £1,972/4/08 was accepted from Herbert Parker for the construction of the *Newcastle Post Office*. The building was completed in November of the same year.⁴¹ The two storey brick building consists of a public office, operators room (for the telegraph service) and quarters with a separate entrance for the Postmaster.⁴² It was one of 100 new and 20 portable post offices designed from standard plans by the Western Australian Public Works Department in the period, 1885-1897. Ten or more basic plans were used and adapted to suit climate, distance from the Capital and

Australia, WA, 1993) p. 62; Erickson, R., *Old Toodyay and Newcastle, Shire of Toodyay*, 1974, p. 355.

33 *ibid.*, Erickson, p. 20.

34 *ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

35 *ibid.*, pp. 81, 154 & 171.

36 *ibid.*, Pope, p. 62.

37 *ibid.*, Erikson, p. 150.

38 *ibid.*, Pope, p. 62. Cites the first Newcastle Post Office operated from May, 1861; *ibid.*, Erikson, p. 167; cites there was a proposal to build a post office at the Convict Depot in January, 1862; and Callow, B., *Heritage Assessment for Toodyay Post Office* (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, 1994) for site plan W1-0840, dated 1895 for location of the former and New Post Office.,

39 *ibid.*, Erikson, Ch. 38-39.

40 *ibid.*, pp. 318-319.

41 Oldham, R. & J., *George Temple Poole, Architect of the Golden Years, 1885-1897*, University of Western Australia Press, 1980, p. 51, and *ibid.*, Pope, Appendix 1, p. 147.

42 *ibid.*, Pope, p. 62, Appendix 3, p. 155, and Appendix 4, p. 161, and Van Bremen, I. H., *The New Architecture of the Gold Boom*, Appendix C8.

availability of local materials and skills.⁴³ It appears that local bricks were used in the construction of *Newcastle Post Office*, as well as the new Courthouse (now the Shire Offices) and Police Station that were also built in this period.⁴⁴

The design of the post office has been linked to other Arts and Crafts influenced post office buildings, for example, East Perth (1897, now demolished) and Glen Innes, NSW (1895-6).⁴⁵ The Architect in charge of the Public Works Department at the time was, George Temple Poole.

George Temple Poole (1856-1934) was born and educated in England. After being articled to his Architect and Surveyor stepfather, he eventually set up his own practice. On the 13 June 1885, he took up the position of Superintendent of Public Works in Western Australia. He was Director of Public Works from 1888, until Responsible Government in 1890, Colonial Architect and Superintendent of the Public Works Department (PWD), and finally Engineer in Chief from 1891, until he retired in January 1897. In March, 1897, he was replaced as Principal Architect of the Architectural Division of the PWD by John Grainger. During his period in charge of PWD architecture, he presided over the design and construction of many significant buildings, these include, the *Western Australian Museum* (1896-7); *The Perth Mint* (1896-9); *The Observatory* (1896); *Titles Office* (1897); and post offices including, *Pinjarra Post Office* (1895); and *Beaconsfield Post Office* (1896). After Poole retired, he floated a company to finance Perth Tramways (1898) and from December 1900 to March 1902, he was Architect for the Staff Quarters of the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme. He was active in public life, literary contributions and lecturing at the technical school. On retiring from practice in 1930, he moved to Darlington. He died 27 February 1934.⁴⁶

Newcastle Post Office, renamed Toodyay Post Office in 1910, to avoid confusion with the town of Newcastle NSW,⁴⁷ has been described as 'typical Victorian Classical Style'⁴⁸ 'a good example of the public buildings of the period and a focal point on Stirling Terrace',⁴⁹ and 'Arts and Craft influence'.⁵⁰

Constructed drawings No. WA 5241 and dated 7 November 1900, for the *Newcastle Post Office* (now Toodyay) from the Australian Archives, are thought to be the earliest surviving drawings of the building.⁵¹ The drawings show the original design of the two storey brick building, much as it exists today, except for some internal alterations and modifications brought about by changes in usage. The original building layout shows postal and telegraph facilities on the ground floor together with the Postmaster's kitchen to the rear with dining room and stairs on the west. The remainder of the Postmaster's quarters are provided on the first floor with a balcony over the post office entry below.

43 *ibid.*, Van Bremen, p. 335.

44 *ibid.*, Erickson, p. 319.

45 A. P. Historic Properties Survey WA, 1990, p. 72.

46 Molyneux, I., *Looking Around Perth; a guide to the architecture of Perth and surrounding towns*, (Wescolour Press, 1981), pp. 16-53, and *ibid.*, Van Bremen, pp. 30-33, and *ibid.*, Oldham.

47 *ibid.*, Pope, p. 62.

48 *Heritage of Western Australia: the illustrated register of the National Estate*, (Macmillan, 1989) pp. 108-109.

49 Chitty, I., *Toodyay, a survey of historical buildings*, no date ref. 1(c) 16.

50 *ibid.*, A. P. Historical Properties, pp. 71-72.

51 *ibid.*, Pope, p. 161.

Australia Post Property Division files contain few detailed drawings of *Toodyay Post Office*. However, two site plans, one numbered B350 dated 8 August 1952 (or 1956 - undecipherable) and the other W1-0840 dated 14 February 1952 (and progressively updated until 1984), show the development of the combined site, lot 147 (now lots 30 & 31), before and after the construction of the new telephone exchange in 1963. Architectural Drawing W2-0840 shows the internal layout and room usage as it currently exists. The kitchen has been relocated into the former dining room. The space made vacant by the kitchen and the former telephone room, have been turned over to mail rooms. New public letter boxes, previously located in the front entry porch, were installed in greater numbers during 1989, to back onto the side and rear of the former kitchen.

In 1995, work on the *Toodyay Post Office and Residence* has been done to upgrade the interior of the place for use as a modern postal facility and retail post shop. This work has been done in consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission and the Heritage Council of Western Australia so that the cultural heritage significance of the place is not compromised.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Toodyay Post Office is situated at No. 117, Lot 30 on the corner of Stirling Terrace to the north, and Duke Street to the east. The two-storey, red brick post office is positioned down from the Duke Street corner but hard on the Stirling Terrace front boundary. The modest size building is given prominence in the streetscape by its open location on the corner at Duke St, and in its spacing between the Postmaster's quarters and its closest neighbour on Stirling Terrace, *Toodyay Memorial Hall*.⁵² Although smaller in scale than the large two-storey *Hotel Victoria* opposite, the spacious setting and two-storey height of *Toodyay Post Office* provides balance in the streetscape.

The building is built of plain red brick with a struck joint. A painted, rendered band of brickwork stepped out around the base of the walls to floor level, forms a solid plinth on which the building sits. The brickwork on the two front elevations is in English bond. The brickwork on the other elevations is in stretcher bond except for the upper courses of the corbelled first floor chimney breast of the west wall, which are also in English bond.

Brickwork detailing is simple other than for the large, strong arches which spring from either side of a corner brick pier at the entry porch. The semi circular arches are lined with a band of one and a half bricks wide radiating around the arch. Although not curved, a similar width band of brickwork forms the flat arch lintel over the windows. The detailing of chimneys is also simple, with several corbelled courses of brickwork at their top.

The roof of the Post Office is hipped and clad with corrugated iron sheeting. The iron sheeting is in continuous lengths suggesting it has been re-roofed in recent times. The underside of the roof to the balcony retains its original painted tongue and grooved boarded lining, as does the ceiling to the porch below.

⁵² *ibid.*, Molyneux, p. 112, cites a one line entry for the 1899 Toodyay Memorial Hall describing it "Like the Freemasons Hotel group, as if from the hand of some wilful cake decorator."

The entry porch has a pair of fully glazed double entry doors (not original) on one wall and a rendered panel, which originally housed public letterboxes, now relocated to the rear. A large painted panel now fills the opening where the letterboxes were originally located.

The corner brick pier supporting the arches of the entry porch, continues to the level of the upper floor balustrade to support a moulded colonnette supporting the overhanging roof hip of the balcony. This roof over the corner balcony is at a lower level than the main roof, running into the underside of the eaves. This element of the building design, together with the entry serves to accentuate the corner address of the post office. The visual impact of the balcony is completed by a timber balustrade with staggered, alternating horizontal members between the widely spaced vertical balusters. This timber detail is a variation on that shown on the early drawings and it was not ascertained as to whether this is how it was originally built or the result of later renovations.

A feature of the building is the tall double hung windows to the street facade on the ground and upper floors. The lower sash is two paned with a vertical mullion. The upper sashes of the ground floor windows are nine paned while the upper sashes of the smaller first floor windows are four paned. An ornamental sill of painted, moulded render scroll runs continuously below the window pairs at the ground floor level. These details, with variations, feature on many smaller public buildings of this era; and bear strong resemblance to several other post and telegraph offices designed by Poole.

A rendered signage panel located between the ground and upper floor windows is located on the Stirling Terrace facade. The sign contrasts with the surrounding brickwork and completes the facade. The sign currently reads 'Toodyay Post Office'; however, early photographs read, 'Post and Telegraph Office'.⁵³

A single storey entry porch for the Postmaster's quarters is a dominant element on the West elevation. The porch is supported on turned timber posts with decorative timber infill arches between the corner post and the walls. The detail mimics the brick arches of the Post Office entry, but adapted to a domestic scale. The entry door to the Postmaster's quarters is a half glazed timber panelled door with glazed sidelights and top lights. The door may be an indication of the style of the original main Post Office entry doors, that were replaced by circa 1960s fully glazed double doors. The treatment to the entry door to the Postmaster's quarters is consistent with the treatment of the internal doors throughout the Post Office.

The rear elevation features a projecting stair landing and bathroom with rendered brick walls in white painted roughcast stucco. The treatment of these walls is indicated on the early drawings and establishes the Arts and Crafts origins of the overall design. The character of the building reflects

⁵³ *ibid.*, Erickson, p. 310 for photograph.

Federation Free Style and Federation Arts and Crafts⁵⁴ common in the work of George Temple Poole and Public Works architecture of the turn-of-the-Century.

The interior to the *Toodyay Post Office and Residence* is simply finished and retains much of its original character. It has plain plastered walls and high ceilings which originally featured a deep moulded cornice. The public foyer of the post office, which is separated from the large general office behind by a moulded arch over a counter, displays an original cornice. The replacement and lowering of the ceiling in the general office has reduced the cornice to a small moulding. These two spaces retain most of their original character. A wood grain laminex lined counter has been recently installed. As early detail drawings of the original counter are still in existence, it would be achievable to reinstate the counter. Doors from the general office to the mail room and stairwell of the quarters, are four panelled with highlight windows and in good condition.

The mail rooms behind the general office (former telephone room and kitchen) have been opened up. Existing ceilings have been replaced without cornices, which is probably as they were originally. New suspended air conditioning ducts now dominates the space. The former kitchen has been fitted with public letterboxes to its east and south walls. The opening in its west wall, to the former dining room, has now been flushed over, although is visible due to cracking.

Each of the main rooms originally had fireplaces; however, these have all been closed off except for the corner fireplace in the old telephone room which still has its timber surround and mantle.

In work undertaken in 1995, it is proposed that the sheeted metal wall that separates the porch and the general office be replaced by a brick wall, with face bricks to match the originals. Inside, alterations to the fitout of the interior of the building to convert it to a modern post shop do not affect the fabric of the building and can reversed if required.⁵⁵

13.3 REFERENCES

Callow, B., *Heritage Assessment for Toodyay Post Office* (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, 1994).

Oldham, J. & R., *George Temple Poole Architect of the Golden Years 1885-1897*, University of Western Australia Press, 1980, pp. 38-51.

Pope, B., Bush, F., Broomfield, W., & Kelsall, D., *Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia owned by Australian Post*, (for the National Trust of Australia, WA, 1993).

⁵⁴ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson, 1989, pp. 136-143.

⁵⁵ AHC correspondence to Australia Post 13 January 1995, HCWA file 2576