



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

McNess Royal Arcade is a richly ornamented example of the Federation Free Classical style, as applied to a commercial building. In this instance the internal walls of the upper levels of the arcade are as finely detailed as the street facades, creating an impressive volume, which contributes to the aesthetic value of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

The rhythmical expression of *McNess Royal Arcade* creates a distinctive corner landmark in the Perth central business district. With adjoining buildings in both Hay and Barrack Streets it forms part of a notable streetscape of gold boom buildings. (Criterion 1.3)

McNess Royal Arcade's display of florid ornamentation, evident in many gold boom buildings in Western Australia, presents an interesting contrast in architectural styles with the more sober Victorian Free Gothic style of the *Perth Town Hall* (1868-1870). (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

McNess Royal Arcade demonstrates the ebullient decorative form and style favoured in the late 1890s, and illustrates the confidence and prosperity generated by the gold boom in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

A substantial masonry building, originally accommodating sixty four shops and offices, and replacing five corrugated iron shops on the site, *McNess Royal Arcade* is an example of the incredible development and changes that took place in the Perth central business district in the late 1890s. (Criterion 2.2)

McNess Royal Arcade is closely associated with the McNess family, which had 99 years of unbroken use and continuity of development of the site at the corner of Hay and Barrack Streets, from 1881 to 1980, and, specifically, philanthropist Sir Charles McNess, whose generosity to his fellow West Australians, particularly during the Depression, was acknowledged by his knighthood. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

McNess Royal Arcade is a distinctive corner landmark in the city centre, and provides a strong sense of place, time and continuity to the community. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

McNess Royal Arcade is a rare example of a retail arcade from the gold boom period in Western Australia. The impressive spatial qualities of the ornamented, double volume, L-shaped configuration of the arcade and its decorative detailing are unique in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

McNess Royal Arcade is representative of the ebullient style of gold boom architecture in Western Australia demonstrating an increasing confidence in the prosperity of the state. (Criterion 6.1)

McNess Royal Arcade demonstrates retail arcade design at the turn of the century. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

McNess Royal Arcade is generally in sound condition, with a budget allocated for routine maintenance.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The current use of *McNess Royal Arcade* for retail, office and entertainment purposes is largely in keeping with the original intent of the design. Whilst the arcade is not currently available for public use, most of the original building fabric still exists in situ, and the quality of the arcade is recoverable. Overall, the place retains a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Parts of the building fabric at ground floor and in the basement of *McNess Royal Arcade* have been altered, and have a low degree of authenticity. However, with a few exceptions most of the building fabric on the upper floors is intact.

Overall, the building retains its authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman.
The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

McNess Royal Arcade, situated at the intersection of Hay and Barrack Streets, Perth, is a three storey commercial building in the Federation Free Classical style, built in 1897.¹ At the time of construction, Western Australia was experiencing a gold boom and the Free Classical style was well suited to express 'the ebullient confidence' of these boom years.

During the gold rush period

the business potential of both Perth and Fremantle expanded, with the result that the central parts of the old towns were practically rebuilt with a complete change of style.²

[For Perth] the advent of the railway line also changed the town's orientation away from the river and toward the railway station. This generated the growth of the major retail shopping centre in the area between William and Barrack Streets and Hay Street.³

McNess Royal Arcade was constructed for Charles McNess, who had arrived in Western Australia in 1876, as a 'small capitalist'.⁴ His association with the land on which the Royal Arcade building stands began in 1881, when he leased six lots of land (Perth Building Lot F1, Lots 7-12) at the corner of Hay and Barrack Streets from William Samson; describing the land as 'the princible (sic) corner in Hay St'.⁵ He erected five galvanised iron shops on this land, one in which he ran a tinsmith and ironmonger business, and the others he leased out.⁶

In 1895 the Supreme Court ordered the sale of all of Perth Building Lot F1, following a dispute between Henry Oakes and William Samson, both of whom had interests in the property.⁷ This sale drew a great deal of public interest, as it was expected to give a clear indication of the value of centrally

¹ Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1989), p. 104; Photograph of Royal Arcade building, *Western Mail*, Christmas 1897, p. 80.

² Morison, M. P. & White, J. (Eds) *Western Towns and Buildings*. (Nedlands, UWA Press, 1979), p. 54.

³ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴ *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, pp. 353-354.

⁵ Letter from Charles McNess to his mother and siblings in England, March 1881 State Archives/Battye Library Acc. 2605A/23. McNess Family Papers Personal Correspondence 1881-1935.

⁶ *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, pp. 353-354; Letter from Charles McNess to his mother and siblings in England, March 1881 State Archives/Battye Library Acc. 2605A/23. McNess Family Papers Personal Correspondence 1881-1935; Photograph of business premises, 1893; *Wise's Postal Directories 1893-1897*.

⁷ Conditions of sale of Perth Building Lot F1 by Oates & Wife and Samson & others, 1895.

situated city properties.⁸ McNess purchased a parcel of three lots of the Hay Street property (Lots 9-11) for £12 550.⁹

In 1896 Charles McNess moved his business to Wellington Street, and set about constructing a more substantial building on the Hay Street site, one that was more in keeping with the current development of the city centre.¹⁰ His original corrugated iron shops had been in use for fifteen years and had provided a good return: he used the phrase 'coining money', when writing to his family about his success in the colony.¹¹

McNess Royal Arcade building was designed by architect William Wolf, who also designed the nearby *Theatre Royal/Hotel Metropole* (1897) and *His Majesty's Theatre* (1904).¹² Wolf was born in New York City and trained as an architect in Germany. After migrating to Australia he worked in Melbourne and then Sydney, before setting up a successful practice in Perth in 1895.¹³ The arcade was originally designed with two storeys, but at McNess's request a third storey was added.¹⁴

In 1898, *McNess Royal Arcade* was valued by B. C. Wood, Land and Property Valuers, as consisting of land worth £22,400, and buildings worth £13,000, bringing in a rental of £33 per week. The valuer's report described the place in detail:

The Property referred to in this valuation consists of land & buildings contained in sections 9.10 & 11 of Perth, Building Lot F1 having a frontage at 80ft to Hay Street by a depth of 104ft to Barrack Street. This property has access to St George's Terrace by means of a right of way.

The buildings consist of the Perth Arcade containing basement ground floor & first & second floors. The basement & the buildings cover the whole area of the property. The basement is floored with jarrah board, is well ventilated & is occupied as a billiard saloon, café, refreshment bars etc. The ground floor contains six (6) shops facing Hay & Barrack Streets and 11 shops facing the arcade. The first floor contains 11 offices facing Barrack & Hay Streets & 13 facing the arcade. The second floor 11 rooms on Barrack & Hay Streets and 12 rooms on the arcade.

The foundations are concrete & the walls of the basement to ground floor joists are constructed in heavy brickwork.

The ground floor is supported on heavy girders, brick columns & arches. The floor is laid in tiles & leadlights the latter to light the basement.

The outer walls of the building are substantially built in brick. The front elevation finishes in a parapet & is heavily cemented & handsomely decorated.

⁸ 'Sale of valuable city properties: The Samson estate', *The Western Mail*, 23 August 1895, p. 31.

⁹ Letter from Septimus Burt QC, of Stone & Burt, confirming sale, payment and transfer of title, 19 May 1896, Battye Library State Archives McNess family personal papers, 2605A/11; DOLA Certificate of Title, Vol. 4 Fol. 181, Vol 90. Fol. 159.

¹⁰ *Wise's Postal Directories* 1896.

¹¹ Letter from Charles McNess to his mother and siblings in England, March 1881

¹² Molyneux, Ian. *Looking Around Perth: A Guide to the architecture of Perth and surrounding towns*. (Compiled for the Royal Australian Institute of Architecture - WA Chapter). (Perth, Wescolour Press, 1981), p. 28.

¹³ Morison, M. P. *Immigrant Architects and Their Work 1885-1905*. (Unpublished paper).

¹⁴ Architectural drawing of the Hay St elevation of the Royal Arcade, by William Wolf. (c. 1896)

The inner walls & partitions are of 9in & 4 1/2in brickwork & in some cases on second floor are Lath & Plaster.

All inner walls are finished in fine plaster work and the arcade is very handsomely decorated with plaster columns & other ornamentation.

The framing & flooring is principally in Oregon & Baltic Pine also ceiling & floor joists etc.

The roof is covered with iron & glass, properly constructed & guttered.

The staircases are mixed Jarrah & Pine.

The building is well constructed in every particular and occupies one of the best positions in Perth being on the corners of two important streets and in the very centre of the business life of the city.

Electric light is installed in the building & water is laid on.

Lavatories & bathrooms etc. are provided on each floor.

The Arcade itself has entrances from Hay & Barrack Streets & provides ample room for the various businesses carried on therein...¹⁵

In 1919, following his retirement, Charles McNess transferred ownership of *McNess Royal Arcade* to his son Herbert Fortescue McNess, while retaining an office for himself on the first floor of the building (No. 21), facing Hay Street.¹⁶

In his later years Charles McNess was well known for his philanthropic endeavours, especially during the Depression years. His gifts included £1,200 for the upkeep of the State War Memorial, £90,000 for the McNess Housing Trust to provide homes for needy families, £4,000 to the State Gardens Board to provide employment, £3,000 to the Perth Public Hospital, and £20,000 to the State to provide employment in the development of a national park at Yanchep.¹⁷

He also supported the YMCA, Legacy, RSL, St John Ambulance Association and the Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Congregational churches. Knighted in 1931, McNess died in 1938. In his will he left a further £32,000 to charities, institutions and churches. His name, and that of his wife, Annie Poncy McNess, are commemorated in a number of memorials around Perth, including the McNess Memorial (Presbyterian) Hall in Pier Street, Lady McNess Drive, and the McNess Memorial (fountain), which stood for many years in the middle of Stirling (Government) Gardens.¹⁸

Herbert McNess owned the property until his death in 1980.¹⁹ Since 1986, *McNess Royal Arcade* has been owned by the University of Western Australia.

In 1985, the arcade was subject to alterations. The Hay and Barrack Streets ends of the arcade were filled in with a shop, and a false ceiling built over the double volume arcade, at the first floor level.

15 Valuation of Perth City Property for C. McNess Esq., Arcade Buildings, by B. C. Wood, Land & Property Valuers, 1 December 1898.

16 DOLA Certificate of Title, Vol. 4, Fol. 181; Lease of 21 Royal Arcade, H. F. McNess to Charles McNess, 1 July 1919; Physical inspection of the property, Nov. 1995.

17 *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, pp. 353-354; Letter from Premier Sir James Mitchell accepting initial offer of £10 000 for housing trust, 1930.

18 *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, pp. 353-354.

19 DOLA Certificate of Title, Vol. 10110, Fol. 571.

Currently, the basement houses a tavern, in place of the original billiard saloon and refreshment bars, the ground floor is occupied by shops, the office space facing Hay Street is occupied, but the office space on the top floor is unoccupied or used for storage.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

McNess Royal Arcade is a three storey commercial building located at the south-west corner of the Hay Street Mall. It is directly opposite the *Perth Town Hall* (1868-1870) and has frontages to both Barrack and Hay Streets. The building was constructed in 1897, and is characteristic of the Federation Free Classical style.²⁰

The street elevations express a rhythmical pattern of fluted columns and arched fenestration, and are richly embellished with ornate stucco decoration. The two street frontages contain the same number of bays, although the proportions differ owing to the shorter width of the Hay Street elevation. Triangular pediments at first floor, and also above the balustraded parapet, accentuate the location of the arcade entrances.

Internally, the facades of L-shaped arcade displays a similar grand character. A corridor skirts the building at the upper floors providing access to the tenancies which front either the street or the arcade. The volume of the three storey arcade is enclosed with a pitched, glass and metal decked roof. The timber ceiling lining the apex is punctuated with ventilation grilles.

The internal finishes of the upper floor tenancies are diverse owing to the individual nature of previous tenants. With the exception of the first floor rooms along Hay Street, which are occupied by the tenant of a neighbouring building, the rooms are currently vacant, providing miscellaneous storage space. Most rooms have finely corrugated iron ceilings, with the ceiling skylights of the second floor lined with pressed metal.

The two second floor rooms behind the large window openings accentuating the arcade entrances contain low, rectangular, timber constructions along the exterior wall. These constructions intrude significantly into the floor space but are not obvious externally. The circular windows evident in and above the triangular pediments of the street facades are located above these timber boxes.

Alterations to the building fabric at street level have resulted in a loss of much of the original grandeur of the facades. The verandah was originally constructed with slender cast iron columns, and included barrel vaults above the arcade entrances. William Wolf's drawings indicator intricate filigree within the arcade arches, although this detail is not discernible in early photographs of the building. It is unclear at what stage the verandah was replaced by the present awning. The cantilevered awning is supported with tie rods above the canopy. The art deco styled fascia is continuous around the two street elevations of the building. A change in the fascia detailing, in the location of the original arcade entrances, maintains some of the original prominence of these bays.

²⁰ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 104-107.

Drawings prepared by Hobbs Winning Leighton & Partners in 1985, document renovations to *McNess Royal Arcade* with the subsequent loss of the concept of an arcade. The retail infill of the arcade at the ground floor prevents public access through the building from Hay to Barrack Streets, and also to the upper levels which are largely unoccupied.

New shop fronts, consisting of timber framed glazing between painted masonry columns, maintain the rhythmical expression of the building. The detail of the fanlight located above the shop sign is borrowed from the semi-circular window within the triangular pediment at the first floor. Internally, the shops have simple and various surface finishes in keeping with their current commercial function.

Other modifications to the building fabric include the removal of the public staircases to the upper levels of the arcade; the construction of a new stairwell opening directly onto Barrack Street; the demolition of two rooms and part of the external brick wall on the second floor to provide an open plant area - the internal windows onto the arcade in these rooms have been bricked in; and the insertion of chipboard, spanning the arcade opening at first floor level, to form the ceiling of the ground floor tenancies. Part of the original wrought iron balcony balustrade on this level is still in evidence.²¹

13.3 REFERENCES

Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939,

B. C. Wood, Land & Property Valuers, 'Valuation of Perth City Property for C. McNess Esq.'

²¹ The balustrade is embossed with the manufacturer's name, Swinerton & Frew. Registered 202. 8 May 1885.