



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

Perth Girls' School (fmr) demonstrates a degree of technical and design excellence, which was professionally recognised by the award of a RIBA Bronze Medal in 1939. (Criterion 1.2)

Designed as a large, single building and situated on a prominent hill-side, *Perth Girls' School (fmr)* possesses a landmark quality that dominates the surrounding landscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Perth Girls' School (fmr) was designed and constructed as an independent girls school with the primary emphasis being on domestic science, and as such it reflects the particular community and educational philosophy of the time. (Criterion 2.1)

The monumental scale of *Perth Girls' School (fmr)*, and the substantial investment of resources, after a period of extreme hardship and personal privation for many, and the investment of the resources involved, reflected the government's great optimism for the future of Perth. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Perth Girls' School (fmr) is significant because of its social and cultural associations with a particular phase in educational policy and it is valued by the sections of the community who were associated with it. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The location and design of the building in the Inter-War Stripped Classical style, is a rare use of a style more often associated with parliamentary buildings and government departments than with state schools. (Criterion 5.1)

Perth Girls' School (fmr) is a rare example in Western Australia of a flagship government school. *Perth Girls' School (fmr)* was designed with a distinctive function in mind in an era of centralised education that has now been replaced by more community based schools with wider curriculums. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

12. 3 CONDITION

Perth Girls' School (fmr) is in sound condition. A program of regular maintenance has conserved the fabric of the building.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Although there have been some modifications and alterations as a result in the change of use, *Perth Girls' School (fmr)* has retained its integrity as a large school building.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Despite the loss of some original detailing, as a result of the requirements of modern office use, *Perth Girls' School (fmr)* retains a high level of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former *Perth Girls' School* is an imposing Inter-War Stripped Classical style building built, in 1936, to provide an independent girls school with an emphasis on domestic science.

The education system, during the late 1920s and early 1930s, was faced with many difficulties. Classes were over crowded, equipment inadequate and buildings unrenovated. It was the over crowding in the central city schools that led to the eventual construction of the girls school in East Perth, in an effort to gain relief. Plans for the school were finalised in 1934; however, due to the effects of the Depression finance was not immediately forthcoming. David Mossenson writes, "The overcrowding of the central school was typical of the age, and no more than a temporary measure of relief was obtained in 1936 when a large girls school was erected at East Perth."¹

The school was designed to accommodate approximately 500 girls, and their teachers. The plans were prepared through the architectural division of the Public Works Department under the direction of Principal Architect, Mr. A. E. Clare. Len Green and Len Walters were also closely associated with the development of the project. *Perth Girls' School* was planned in an 'E' shape with the main entrance from Wellington Street opposite the centre leg. The lower ground floor comprised a shelter and lunch area with tuck-shop, in the stem of 'E' plan, above which on the ground and first floors were classrooms. The three legs on the 'E' plan were designed as physics and chemistry rooms, a general assembly hall, and domestic science and needlework rooms respectively.

The library was in a central position on the first floor and the Art room was located in the tower. In addition there was a refectory for teachers' meals, a lecture theatre and an assembly hall that was fitted with footlighting, drop curtains and change rooms. The building was seen as a modern achievement, incorporating a number of modern facilities. "Those of us whose memory of school life is bounded by hard desks and crude hat pegs will be pleasingly impressed by the built-in equipment."² Even the colour scheme was carefully thought out, "Another interesting novelty in the new school will be the treatment of the various schoolrooms in a variety of colour schemes in order to create a cheerful atmosphere and avoid monotony."³

The building also incorporated the latest technology of the time. Electronic clocks were used in all rooms and a master broadcast receiving set, linked with classrooms, was located in the office of the Headmistress which enabled the school to utilise radio as an educational resource.⁴

¹ Mossenson, D. *State Education in Western Australia 1829 - 1960* (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1972) p. 143.

² *Building and Construction* 8 May 1936, p. 3.

³ *ibid.* ; Clare, A.E., 'The East Perth Central Girls' School' in *The Architect* June 1939, Vol. I, No.1, p. 18.

⁴ RAIA (WA) '50 Years of Award Winning Architecture' in *The Architect* 82/3 Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 10; *Building and Construction* 8 May 1936, p. 3.

Perth Girls' School was ready for occupation by 1 September 1936, and a week later 502 girls were transferred from James Street school to begin work in the new premises. An official opening ceremony was held on 11 September 1936.⁵

The *Annual Report* of the Public Works Department noted the completion of the school:

This new post-primary school was completed in the early part of the year at a cost of £70,373. The building and grounds were designed so as to provide every facility necessary to give complete expression to a modern curriculum for girls.⁶

The *Building and Construction* article concludes with a statement that reflects the changing nature of the school system of the day:

The foregoing description will afford an idea, not only of the sweeping changes which have taken place in school construction, but also of the far-reaching and scientific developments in our system of public education which have made those changes necessary.⁷

The design excellence and architectural merit of *Perth Girls' School* was recognised by a Royal Institute of British Architects award. The RIBA had initiated an award for street architecture in London in 1923, which aimed 'to encourage excellence in design in street facades' and in 1932, offered a similar award to the Royal Institute of Architects, Western Australia, to be awarded every three years.⁸ An explanation of the purpose of the award was published in the first copy of *The Architect* in June 1939:

One of the main purposes of the Award is to direct public attention to new buildings of outstanding architectural merit, and to give a wide recognition to the good qualities of design in such buildings.⁹

Perth Girls' School received a RIBA Bronze Medal in 1939, for the period 1936 - 1938. The Director of Education, Mr. C. Hadley, commenting on the award said that:

The design of the building and the layout of the grounds had been commended by educationists of the various States and by visitors from the United States and Britain. They had also been impressed by the beauty of the structure ... and many requests had been received for blueprints so that features of the design could be used in the erection of similar buildings elsewhere in Australia.¹⁰

In 1946, the school's name changed to *Perth Girls' High School* at a time when all central schools were given high school status.¹¹

⁵ Kelly, I., 'Perth Girls' School: 1936 (1947) to 1962: A New Heritage' (unpublished report, May 1994), p. 6.

⁶ *Votes and Proceedings* 1937 Vol II p. 26.

⁷ *Building and Construction* 8 May 1936, p. 3.

⁸ RAIA (WA) '50 Years of Award Winning Architecture' in *The Architect* 82/3 Vol. 22 No. 3, p. 6. From 1964 a new system of architectural awards was introduced, the principal award being known as 'the Bronze Medal of the W.A. Chapter'.

⁹ Quoted in RAIA (WA) '50 Years of Award Winning Architecture' in *The Architect* 82/3 Vol. 22 No. 3, p. 6.

¹⁰ *West Australian* 15 June 1939, quoted in Le Page, J. S. H. *Building a State* (WAWA, Perth, 1986) p. 466.

¹¹ Kelly, p. 10.

Perth Girls School (fmr) is no longer used as a school. Enrolments began to fall in the late 1950s when centralised education was replaced by education which was community based.¹² The school was officially closed in November 1962 and, in March 1963, the Police Department moved in, remaining there until 1966, when the new Central Police Headquarters at the Causeway were opened. The Traffic Branch remained at the school and it became the Police Traffic Department.¹³

In January 1995, *Perth Girls' School (fmr)* continues to be used by the Police Traffic Department.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The former *Perth Girls' School* is sited on the corner of Wellington and Plain Streets and occupies a commanding hill-side position with views of the Swan River. Despite the encroachment of high rise buildings in the vicinity, the former *Perth Girls' School* still dominates the landscape. When the school was constructed the site occupied five acres of land, bounded by Wellington Street, Bronte Street, Horatio Street and Plain Street.¹⁴ On 21 November 1934, a Bill was passed through the State Parliament providing for the closure of a portion of Forrest Avenue (the north eastern end) to allow for the provision of the school sports ground.¹⁵ As the architect of the building pointed out, "The area of land available for the new Institution being already divided by a main traffic road (Plain Street) into approximately equal parts, it followed that one portion should be used for the school building and the other for playing fields."¹⁶

The former *Perth Girls' School* building is constructed in the Inter-War Stripped Classical style. Apperly (et al) writes that the building exhibits, "Compelling Palladian form, with roof shapes adding to an Art Deco affect."¹⁷ The Classical Palladian facade of the building consists of a colonnaded form with a dominant central block which is echoed by lesser blocks at each end. Here the main body of the building is made up of what were two rows of six classrooms, which are grouped in threes. This grouping of three is repeated in the fenestration throughout the building. The building is also comprised of three main blocks and features three archways at the portico.

The design of *Perth Girls' School* included: reinforced concrete foundation brick load bearing walls; reinforced concrete floors with jarrah counter floors; wooden doors and windows; and, wooden roof trusses. Externally, a base of plum coloured double pressed bricks with deeply raked joints, and above the base cream cement rendering, lined off and coloured in imitation of local stone. The external wood-work was finished in off-white except for the main entrance doors which are finished olive green.¹⁸

¹² National Trust (WA) Assessment, July 1991.

¹³ Kelly, p. 18.

¹⁴ *West Australian* 17 January 1935, p. 17.

¹⁵ Clare, p. 18. This land is now the site of the Main Roads administration building.

¹⁶ Clare, *ibid*.

¹⁷ Apperly, R. (et al) *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the present* (Angus and Robertson Publishers, N.S.W., 1989) pp. 164-167.

¹⁸ Clare, p. 18.

Since being acquired by the Police Traffic Department, in 1963, superficial modifications have been made to meet the modern requirements of a state government department. The western undercroft has been enclosed, in a manner dissimilar to the original design, to provide additional office space. A transportable building has been erected on site to provide extra office space, which is linked to the main building with a covered way. If necessary, this could be easily removed. A brief site inspection revealed that the original school lockers still remained *in situ*.¹⁹

13.3 REFERENCES

Clare, A. E., 'The East Perth Central Girls' School' in *The Architect* June 1939, Vol. 1, No. 1.

Kelly, I., 'Perth Girls' School: 1936 (1947) to 1962: A New Heritage' (unpublished report, May 1994).

National Trust Assessment Exposition, July 1991.

¹⁹ Site visit to take photographs, 27 January 1994. No photographs of the interior were taken.