



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

Built as a hostel rather than a hotel, the *King George Hostel* demonstrates the form of a typical Australian corner hotel in the Federation Queen Anne style. (Criterion 1.1)

King George Hostel is situated on a prominent intersection in Katanning. From the time it was built the building was recognised as making a strong contribution to the Austral Terrace streetscape, and the character of Katanning. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The building demonstrates an alternative form of accommodation, apart from hotels and boarding houses, for single people employed in large country towns in the first half of the twentieth century. (Criterion 2.1)

The continual use, without adaptation, of one of the shops as an office demonstrates a way of life that has been lost to contemporary society. (Criterion 2.1)

The building is closely associated with the Piesse family, who, for many years, were prominent in the development of Katanning and the surrounding district. (Criterion 2.3)

The building demonstrates a stylistic change in commercial architectural design for the partnership of Summerhayes and Boas. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

King George Hostel is held in high regard by the local community for its link with the development of Katanning, the social functions held there over the years and its fine state of conservation. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

King George Hostel is representative of short term accommodation, incorporated with retail and residential purposes, more usually associated with a temperance hotel. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Although the hostel was subject to years of neglect, in recent years it has experienced a considerable amount of conservation work. Apart from normal wear and tear the building appears to be in good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The building continues to be generally used for the its original purposes and retains a high level of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Since 1913, the building has undergone few modifications, and retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

King George Hostel, initially known as St. George's Hostel, was built in 1913, by Alexander Thomson for Melville Piesse.¹ The Katanning district was experiencing a period of farming prosperity, the town was expanding and accommodation for itinerant workers and visitors was scarce. Anchoring the corner of Albion Street and Austral Terrace, the new hostel was a welcomed addition to, 'a row of buildings which are unsurpassed in any inland town of this state.'²

The Piesse family figure prominently in the settlement and development of the Katanning district. William Roper Piesse came to the Swan River Colony in 1842 and married colonial-born Elizabeth Ellen Oxley. Their eldest son Frederick Henry Piesse was born in Northam, in 1853. F.H. Piesse worked at a number of jobs and held various government appointments, which provided him with a sound business grounding. He married in 1877 and left the Public Service in 1880, whereupon he started an importing business, in partnership with his brother Charles, in Williams. During 1888-89, when the Great Southern Railway went through further to the east Piesse established a branch store in Katanning. His store was successful and was soon the largest in the town. Later in 1890, on Piesse's instructions, Perth architect J.J. Talbot Hobbs called for

¹ *Great Southern Herald*, 13 September 1913.

² *Great Southern Herald*, 1 October 1913.

tenders for the Katanning Roller Flour Mill. The mill was officially opened in April 1891, and the Piesse's fortune and influence in Katanning continued to grow.

F.H. Piesse had a long and distinguished political career. Piesse was a member of the Katanning Road Board from 1889 through to 1896. At the same time he was MLA for Williams (1890-1904), during which time he was Commissioner for Railways and Director of Public Works (1896-1900) Acting Premier (1900) and Leader of the Opposition (1901), MLA for Katanning (1904-09) and Father of the House (1905-09).³ He was a wealthy and influential person in Katanning and Western Australia.

Melville Piesse, born in 1890, was the youngest son of F.H. Piesse. Melville was educated in Adelaide and enrolled in a law degree at the Melbourne University, but he soon dropped out and came back to work for local solicitor A.D. Smith. It was at this time his father built, what became known as, *King George Hostel* for Melville. He enlisted in the Australian forces for the Great War and following his return to Australia married a Tasmanian dancer and took up a position as manager of a rubber and copra plantation in New Guinea. Melville Piesse died unexpectedly in New Guinea on 27 December 1920.⁴

King George Hostel was designed by Perth based architectural partnership Summerhayes and Boas. Edwin Summerhayes had had a long professional relationship with the Piesse family, having designed shops and offices in Katanning (1901) and Wagin (1906), as well as the Piesse mansion, *Kobeelya* (1902), and two houses (1905) in Clive Street for two of F.H. Piesse's four sons.⁵ Harold Boas, Summerhayes' partner, was well known in Perth for designing houses, particularly picturesque Queen Anne Revival houses in the new suburb of Mount Lawley.⁶

Like many builders, following the collapse of the building industry in Victoria, Alex(ander) Thomson migrated to the gold boom economy of Western Australia in 1895. He established his contracting business and family life in Buckland Hill and was a member of the Buckland Hill Road Board from 1903-05. Thomson and his family settled at Katanning in 1905, after he gained the contract for the Royal Exchange Hotel. He built a number of the prominent buildings in Katanning, including a large homestead, *Illareen* (1905), for Ross Anderson, the Presbyterian Church (1906), Mechanics' Institute (1906), and a private hospital, *Brockhurst* (1911), for Dr House. Thomson's team of builders worked extensively around the south west of the state; from Albany to Narrogin, west to the Blackwood River and east to Gnowangerup. Thomson was prominent in political affairs. He was a member of the Katanning Road Board(1911-15), and its chairman in 1913. In state politics he was elected the Member (Liberal) for Katanning in 1914,. Switching to the Country Party in 1917,

³ D. Black & G. Bolton, *Biographical Register of Members of the Parliament of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1870-1930, p. 193.

⁴ Erickson, R., (ed.), *Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1914*, Vol.5, p. 727.

⁵ Kelly, I., 'The Development of Housing in Perth (1890-1915)', (unpublished Masters Thesis, UWA, 1991).

⁶ *ibid.*

he became deputy leader (1921-1923) and leader (1923-30). Elected MLC for South East Province Thomson stayed on in parliament until his retirement in 1950.⁷

The local newspaper, writing of the newly opened hostel, stated, 'the town (Katanning) possesses an edifice of which her citizens are justly proud.' The article continues, 'the effective external appearance is in keeping with the modern conveniences throughout.'⁸ Being unlicensed, the hostel building differs from a hotel in that it has shops along the street frontages rather than public bars, although the overall form of *King George Hostel* is in the traditional style of a country hotel. The original tenants in the ground floor shops on Austral Terrace were Mr F.G. Joy, an accountant and auditor, Mr E. Saggars, a bookmaker, and Mr W.P. Bird, a tailor. Around the corner, in Albion Street was Mr O'Grady, an insurance agent. Mrs Clare Edwards, who had previously managed the *Austral Cafe* and lodgings, adjacent to the *Great Southern Herald* offices further along Austral Terrace, ran her tea shop in the ground floor of the hostel building and managed the *King George Hostel* upstairs in the building.

A newspaper article at the time of the opening of the hostel provides a good description of the layout of the building:

The main entrance hall is in Albion Street, where seats, hall stand, etc., are provided. Mounting the staircase to the second floor the second portion of the hall is reached, and this communicates with the spacious balcony. Here are provided facilities for writing, etc., for visitors, and electric bells to connect with the office. Adjoining is a spacious smoking and writing room, with suite upholstered in green, which also opens out on to the balcony. The balcony is a feature of the house, running right round both sides of the building and being 10ft wide, with hanging plants and ferns, etc., adding a pleasing effect. On to this promenade most of the single rooms open. Leaving the smoking room the hall, richly carpeted with velvet pile and covered, divides the building into two rows of bedrooms, double and single, with one suite of three and a bridal chamber finished in white and gold. The drawing room suite is richly upholstered, the floor being tastefully carpeted. The private apartments are situated immediately above the staircase from the Austral Terrace entrance, with the balcony partitioned off. The four bathrooms (hot and cold water) are conveniently distributed.

Opening on the Terrace front are the dining halls, furnished throughout in oak, and at the rear of these are the kitchen, scullery, pantry, bakehouse, etc. ...Mrs Edwards will have her office immediately to the right of the entrance, near the stairway. This hall will now be used exclusively for serving afternoon teas and suppers.⁹

It seems the name St. George's Hostel was used for only a very short period; the place was soon popularly referred to as the *King George Hostel*. Two months after its opening there is reference in the newspaper to a dinner given in December 1913, by the Chairman of the Katanning Road Board, Alex Thomson, 'at Mrs. C. Edward's well-appointed King George Hostel which occupied part of the striking towered building he (Thomson) had not long completed for Melville Piesse, on the corner of Austral Terrace and Albion Street.'¹⁰

7 Black & Bolton, p. 193.

8 *Great Southern Herald*, 1 October 1913.

9 *ibid.*

10 Bignell, M. *A Place to Meet: A History of the Shire of Katanning, Western Australia*. (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1981), pp. 252-53.

Mrs Edwards continued to run the *King George Hostel* until 1928, when a Mrs E.R. Carter was listed in the postal directory as running the place, but Mrs Carter was soon replaced by a Mrs M. Fleay, who was listed as the proprietor in 1934-35 . An advertisement in 1943 lists I.M. Dwyer as the proprietress of the *King George Hostel*.

Following the death of Melville Piesse, the Piesse family retained the ownership of the building, and during the economic downturn, after 1929, Melville's brother Harold and his family lived in the private apartment in the *King George Hostel* building.¹¹ *King George Hostel* was owned by various members of the Piesse Family until 1973, at which time it was bought by George McIntyre (jnr).

The building's ownership changed a number of times until 1987, when the current owners bought the property, and became the first proprietors to formally live in the building and use it as a family home.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

King George Hostel is located on the corner of Austral Terrace and Albion Street Katanning, across the street from the railway station. It is an important intersection which the design of the building addresses well. A contemporary report in the local paper described it thus, 'The buildings are crowned by a lofty tower on the corner of the two thoroughfares, giving the whole a striking finish.'¹²

King George Hostel is designed in a simplified version of the Federation Queen Anne Revival. The building is characterised by the wide (3m) shady timber verandah, which extends round both sides of the building, the conical tower marking the corner, the decorative parapets which highlight the entrances off each street, and the sweep of the terra-cotta marseilles tile roof.

Although the commission for the building came from Summerhayes' long professional relationship with the Piesse family, the design of the building indicates the stylistic influence of Boas, who had just entered into partnership with Summerhayes. The commercial architecture of Edwin Summerhayes was usually of the free classical style. This is best seen in the *Piesse Building*, further along Austral Terrace, designed by Summerhayes in 1901, and the *Piesse Building* (1906) in Wagin. Whereas from an early stage Harold Boas had taken an interest in the Queen Anne Revival and Arts and Crafts styles, which is reflected in the many houses he designed in Perth in the early 1900s and the *Nedlands Park Hotel* (1908). *King George Hostel* is a simplified development of Boas' use of the Queen Anne Revival style.

King George Hostel, which is largely in original condition, is built of load bearing local bricks and stucco, with a roof of marseilles tiles. There are six separate shops at street level, and these have changed very little. Even today one shop, continuously occupied since 1923 by Crouch Accountants, does not have electricity.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.258.

¹² *Great Southern Herald*, 1 October 1913.

The shops and stair-well have pressed metal ceilings and the wooden staircase is in original condition. In the hall is an ornate wooden hall stand with a crest and F.H.P. carved into the top. The public dining room, no longer used as such, remains as does the original large stove and the baker's oven.

The hostel is now privately owned and occupied by its owners, who let a few rooms to the public. The floors are timber, as are the simple verandah posts and balusters. The bedrooms have french doors that open onto the wide balcony, which has a total length of approximately 43 metres (140 feet).

In 1964, Katanning Shire Council sent a 'works order' the property owner demanding that certain repairs and maintenance be undertaken to bring the property up to contemporary health and safety standards, but appears little if any work was done. Some years later, in 1969, the adjacent building, the *Austral Building*, owned by the same proprietor and also in a state of disrepair, was demolished. Only the presence of a paying rent tenant prevented the *King George Hostel* from suffering a similar fate.

The building has been the subject of a restoration program under the present owner. There have been some structural and functional alterations. A disused bathroom was converted into a kitchen. Four walls were partially removed to enlarge small rooms. These new arched openings match existing openings. One window opening was turned into an external doorway, and an internal doorway was placed in the upstairs passage. Electrical wiring has been replaced. All windows have been reglazed. Fireplaces have been repaired, and the timber floors sanded.

The owner proposes to repaint and light the exterior of the building; however, there are no other changes proposed for the fabric of the building.

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition.