



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.

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Jacqui Sherriff, Historian, and Philip Griffiths, Architect, in May 2004, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.19 Marketing and retailing
- 3.8.1 Shipping to and from Australian ports
- 4.1.5 Developing city centres

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 308 Commercial services and industries
- 201 River and sea transport

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

P&O Building (fmr) is a very fine example a seven storey office building of steel framed construction with Donnybrook sandstone and rendered brick cladding in the Inter-War Functionalist style. The place has some very fine interiors in the Inter-War Chicagoesque style, including entrance foyer, lifts, main stair and door hardware. (Criterion 1.1)

Devon House, Gledden Buildings and P&O Building (fmr) create a landmark group of buildings in central Perth in the Inter-War Functionalist and Art Deco styles. (Criterion 1.3)

Located at the west end of the Hay Street Mall, *Devon House, Gledden Buildings and P&O Building (fmr)* on the south side of the street and

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from 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.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J., *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

Economic Stores on the north side of the street visually terminate a strong collection of late nineteenth and twentieth century buildings completed before the outbreak of World War II. (Criterion 1.4)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

P & O Building (fmr) was constructed during the Inter-War period and is representative of the rebuilding of Perth central business district in the Inter-War period at a time when the Great Depression had stemmed much building activity. (Criterion 2.2)

P & O Building (fmr) was built as the Western Australian office of the Orient Steam Navigation Company, one of the two major passenger and cruise liner companies serving Australia from the late 1800s until the 1970s, when cruise shipping diminished in importance as air travel emerged as the popular means of travel. The building was used by the company from 1930 to the 1980s. (Criterion 2.3).

P & O Building (fmr) was designed by the architectural firm of Hobbs, Smith and Forbes, which designed a number of important institutional and commercial buildings in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

P&O Building is valued by the community for its contribution to the built environment of the City of Perth and in particular to the William Street area. Together with the adjacent *Gledden Building* and *Devon House* on Hay Street, and *Economic Stores* on the north side of Hay Street, *P & O Building (fmr)* forms a small group of commercial buildings displaying the aesthetics of the 1930s. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

P&O Building is rare for the degree of intactness of its exterior and equally important interior details. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

P&O Building (fmr) is representative of commercial and retail buildings constructed during the 1930s as part of the movement towards the 'modern' building design and aesthetic. (Criterion 6.1)

P&O Building (fmr) is representative of the predominance of ocean liners as the main form of intra- and intercontinental emigrant and recreational travel up to the 1960s, when sea travel was largely replaced by air travel. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The cumulative effect of maintenance has been to ensure that the exterior of the place has been maintained in near original condition, while the interior has, in part, suffered from neglect and in some cases change has obscured original fabric. Much of the internal change is superficial. The current management regime keeps the public face of the building in good condition, while other areas that are currently not in use are less well cared for. Overall the place is in fair to good condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

P & O Building (fmr) is used as a travel and ticketing office and other similar purposes to those originally intended. The original intentions of those parts of the building that are currently not in use also remain clear. The integrity of the place remains moderate to high.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The exterior of the place is largely intact, as is the lift lobby, stairs and two upper floors internally. Overall *P&O Building (fmr)* retains a moderate to high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Jacqui Sherriff, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Philip Griffiths, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

P&O Building (fmr) was constructed in 1929/30 as the Western Australian office of the Orient Steam Navigation Company (Orient Company). The Orient Company was one of the major passenger and cruise liner companies servicing Australia from the late 1900s to the 1960s, when it formally merged with the Peninsula and Orient Company (P&O) to become the P&O-Orient Line. The building remained the P&O head office in the State until the 1980s, when the company withdrew the majority of Australian services. Since that time, it has been the Western Australian office of Malaysian Airlines.

On 27 July 1829, not long after the official proclamation of the Swan River Colony, Lieutenant Governor Captain James Stirling posted a government notice that proclaimed ‘the new stone will be laid of a New Town, to be called Perth, near to the entrance of the Estuary of the Swan River’.¹ The survey of the new town site began the day after the foundation ceremony on 12 August 1829.² Perth was laid out in a traditional grid pattern with streets surveyed parallel to and at right angles to the main street named St George’s Terrace, thereby forming large blocks which were surveyed into smaller allotments.³

Perth was constituted a city in 1856, but its village landscape appearance⁴ remained relatively unchanged up to the 1880s and 1890s. This was despite the erection of a number of landmark public buildings, such as the Town Hall (1868-1870), during the Imperial Convict period of the late 1850s to 1870s⁵, and the clearing and construction of Perth roads by convict labour from the 1860s up to 1875.⁶

The discovery of gold in the Kimberley, Murchison and Kalgoorlie regions in the 1880s and 1890s, and the concurrent granting of Responsible

¹ Stannage, C. T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia’s Capital City, City of Perth*, Perth, p. 30. The name Perth was chosen in honour of the birthplace of then Secretary of State of the Colonies Sir George Murray. (Markey, D. C., ‘Pioneer Perth’, in Gentilli, J., (ed), *Western Landscapes*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 346.)

² Ibid, pp. 351 – 352.

³ Markey, op. cit., pp. 351 - 352.

⁴ Building regulations drawn up in the 1830s together with the slow progress of the colony resulted in a village landscape of scattered single and two storey brick or stone residences surrounded by gardens mainly to the east of the government domain along Adelaide Terrace, and a slowly developing business area in the vicinity of the government domain to the west of Barrack Street. (Markey, op. cit., pp. 356 – 357; Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193 – 194; Campbell, R., ‘Building in Western Australia 1851 – 1880’, in Pitt Morison, M. & White, J. (eds.), *Western Towns and Buildings*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 90.)

⁵ Campbell, op. cit., pp. 94 – 104; Battye, J. S. (ed), *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, Vol. 1, 1912, Facsimile Edition, Hesperian Press, 1985, p. 356. Perth was initially administered by a Town Trust after it became a city in 1856. The Town Trust was later replaced by a city council in 1871, subsequent to the proclamation of the Municipal Institutions Act of that year. (Battye, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 536; Georgiou, J., ‘The Metropolitan Region’, in Pitt Morison & White, op. cit., p. 247; Stannage, op. cit., p. 193.)

⁶ Stannage, op. cit., pp. 157, 164, 170.

Government to Western Australia in 1890, had a huge impact on the development of Perth.⁷ The physical nature of the city changed dramatically with economic prosperity and the increase of population as a result of gold rush immigration. By the turn of the twentieth century, Perth was totally transformed. Its streets were lined with elaborately styled multi-storey buildings, many of which were the design of a now large architectural profession, and developing suburbs surrounded the city.⁸

With the Central Railway Station to the north of the town site (completed in 1881 and rebuilt in 1894), and the government domain to the south, the area in between was consolidated as the commercial and retail centre of the Perth region.⁹ Banks, insurance buildings and professional and commercial offices were constructed along St. George's Terrace, and businesses, shops and warehouses were established in Murray, Hay and Wellington Streets.¹⁰ A number of hotels and theatres were built in this central area and large emporiums such as Foy and Gibson's and Sandover's emerged along the tram route and the shopping strip of Hay Street. Shopping arcades and passage ways were also developed in this period, allowing people to move with ease through the now busy Perth streets and providing spaces for further business outlets within the form of the narrow blocks.¹¹

Like the rest of the Perth metropolitan region and the state, world and local events had a significant impact on the development of the central Perth area over the next forty years. The Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s affected the initial growth of the state's economy following World War One, which resulted from the expansion of the Western Australian agricultural industry. In turn, the slow recovery from the Depression in the mid to late 1930s was halted by the outbreak of World War Two in 1939.¹² Although building activity during this period was quiet, several new structures appeared in the Perth central area that reflected the phases outlined above and also culture of the time as represented in Art Deco architecture. Along St. Georges Terrace a number of financial and professional institutions had their premises modernized, complete with the remodelling of facades¹³ and at 14 storeys high Perth's first skyscraper, the Colonial Mutual Life Building, was built in 1936 (now demolished)¹⁴. In Hay Street, between William and Barrack Streets, four new arcades were constructed. *Piccadilly Theatre and Arcade* (1938) and *Plaza Theatre (fmr) and Arcade* (1937; 1940) incorporated cinemas in their design and are representative of the popularity the cinema

⁷ Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193; Seddon, G. & Ravine, D., *A City and its Setting*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1986, pp. 146 – 147.

⁸ Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193-4; Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 147. Seddon and Ravine state that: 'In 1904, 10 per cent of central Perth was still vacant land, but by 1911, there was no vacant land left.' (Stannage, op. cit., p. 243, cited in Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 152.)

⁹ Hocking, I., 'Growth and Change in Central Perth', in Pitt Morison & White, op. cit. pp. 266 – 267.

¹⁰ Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 156.

¹¹ Hocking, op. cit., pp. 266 – 268.

¹² Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., pp. 169 – 176; Hocking, op. cit., p. 276.

¹³ For an example see Bizzaca, K. & Pidgeon, J., 'The Western Australian Club', heritage assessment prepared for HCWA, January 1999.

¹⁴ Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 176.

culture in Western Australia during this period.¹⁵ The urban landscape was also changed with the reclamation of the Swan River foreshore for public open space beginning in 1921 and completed by 1931.¹⁶

Amongst the building activity in the late 1920s was the construction of a multi-storey office block for the Orient Line Company.

The Orient Line Company emerged from the ship broking firm of James Thompson & Co, founded in London in 1797. By 1815, the company owned 15 ships and mid-century it entered the Australian trade to meet passenger demand following the discoveries of gold in Victoria. The company ordered a sailing ship to service Australia, and *Orient* was completed in 1854. In 1863, the firm became Anderson, Thompson & Co and in 1866, they placed *Orient* and other ships on a regular service to Australia, trading as the Orient Line of Packets (generally known as the Orient Line). In 1877, by which time the company worked in partnership with Frederick Green & Co and the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, the Orient Line established a regular steam service to Australia with four ships each carrying 72 first class passengers, 92 second class passengers and 265 third class passengers. The third class passengers (the majority of whom were emigrants) that the line carried distinguished it from its major competitor, the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), which began services to Australia in 1852 and catered only for first and second class passengers.¹⁷

A number of steam ship companies serviced Australia from the first days of European settlement, and ships provided the main means of intracolony, intercolony and overseas travel and communication until the establishment of the transcontinental railway network in the early twentieth century. Until the arrival of cheap air travel in the 1960s, the sea continued to be the main means of travel to and from Australia and was the means of travel to Australia for thousands of immigrants in the post-World War II era. From the 1930s to the 1960s, ocean cruising was a very popular holiday activity and a number of shipping companies opened offices in major centres around Australia.

The Orient Line and P&O dominated the Australian market and became intense rivals. Both continued to expand operations and both built a new fleet of ships prior to World War I. However, both companies lost many ships during the war, with the Orient Line suffering the greatest losses. In 1919, P&O achieved a 51 per cent share in the Orient Line Company, heralding a close working relationship between the two companies. The Orient Line continued to operate as a separate entity and by the 1920s was able to re-establish a regular Australian service and established offices in several Australian cities.¹⁸

15 For a discussion see Honniball, J. H. M., 'The Golden Age of Cinema in Perth', in RWAHS, *Early Days*, Vol. 8, Part 6, 1982, pp. 39 – 53.

16 Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 177.

17 Malcolm R Gordon, *From Chusan to Sea Princess: the Australian Services of the P&O and Orient Lines*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1985, pp. 7; 25-26.

18 P&O underwent considerable expansion during the War by taking over a number of shipping companies, including the British India Line (1914), New Zealand Shipping Co and its subsidiary the Federal Steam Navigation Company (1916) and the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand (1917). See *ibid.*

'Impressed with the stability and prospects of the State', the Orient Steam Navigation Company sought a suitable site for a branch office in Western Australia and subsequently purchased the William Street property, then comprising two brick two storey shops (58 and 60 William Street)¹⁹, in December 1927 for £23,000. A third and adjacent shop at 56 William Street was purchased from the University of Western Australia (part of the Gledden bequest) soon after.²⁰ The site was strategically placed between the retail centre of Hay Street and the commercial district centred on St George's Terrace. With the establishment of a branch office of the Orient Line, Perth would achieve the same representation as Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.²¹

Tenders for the six storey building with basement, designed by Hobbs, Smith and Forbes, were called in late 1928 and work by contractor Mr Atwood commenced the following March at the contract price of £41,073.²² Work was well underway by December, with the steel framework almost completed and stone and concrete work commenced on the lower floors.²³

The Orient Line Building was opened on 16 September 1930 by His Excellency, the Governor Sir William Campion. After the 'breaking out of the flags over the new building and the partaking of refreshments', the assembly gathered on the company's liner *Ormonde*, which was berthed at Fremantle Harbour. In addressing the gathering, architect Waldie Forbes stated that they had endeavoured to meet the current slogan of 'use local goods' by using Western Australian materials as far as possible. Mr Atwood, the contractor, followed Forbes' lead, stating that the materials used in the building were 90 per cent Western Australian and it was constructed by local tradesmen. The bronze work was produced in the local Wunderlich Limited factory, while Swan Portland provided the cement, ceiling work was completed by Tindale and Miller Lime Company, tiles and glass by Drabble's Limited; stone, granite and marble supplied by Wilson, Gray & Company, parquet flooring by A T Brine & Sons and the jarrah counter panelling and joinery by Bunning Brothers.²⁴

It was agreed that although 'the design was a little bit away from usual architecture, [it] would be admired by everybody'. The article went on to describe the building in some detail:

The building is of fire-proof, steel-frame construction, with outer walls of concrete and concrete slab-floors; interior stairs of concrete (finished in red 'Vintoid'), steel fire escape stairs, fire-proof glazing on the ground floor, and steel window frames throughout. The façade is of stone and granite.

The structure comprises a basement and six floors, with a flat roof. The frontage is 31 feet and the depth 53 feet. In the basement are two large, well-lighted offices,

¹⁹ See City of Perth, Metropolitan Sewerage, c. 1928, MWSS&DD 1522, Sheet 20, Cons 4156, State Records Office of Western Australia (SRO).

²⁰ All information from City of Perth Rate Book, Central Ward, 1928; 1929.

²¹ *The West Australian*, 21 June 1930, p. 6.

²² *The West Australian*, 15 December 1928, p. 21; *Building and Construction Journal*, 8 March 1929, p. 7. Atwood's was the lowest of 10 tenders, with the highest being £56,335.

²³ *The West Australian*, 7 December 1929, p. 11.

²⁴ All information and quotations from *Building and Construction Journal*, 19 September 1930, p. 23.

lavatory accommodation strong-room and lift to hall. At the rear is a light area, faced with white tiles. A steel fire escape stair leads to the ground floor level.

On the ground floor there is an entrance hall, lift hall, corridor to stairs, main company's office 35ft by 26ft, with offices for manager, sub-manager, and typists; also cloak and telephone rooms, and strong room with stationary cupboard above.

On each of the other five floors there are six offices of varying sizes. The largest being to the front of the building. They are all spacious and well lighted. Lavatory accommodation and wash-basins are also provided on each floor.

On the flat roof caretakers' quarters are situated. They comprise a living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and washhouse.

From the street the building has a very fine appearance, giving at once a suggestion of solidity yet refinement in construction. The façade of the graded Donnybrook freestone (devoid of extraneous architectural detail), the bronze and copper awning and fascia, the bronze shop front and show case through which a glimpse of the richness of the interior may be gained, the polished Darling Range granite around the entrance door, the richness of the bronze entrance doors and porch, all give promise of many fine features of construction.

The promise is immediately fulfilled as one steps through into the entrance hall. The floor is of terrazzo, and the walls are paneled to full height in black, white and brown marble (from Belgium and Italy). The lift hall is also so panelled, and bronze lift fronts are indeed beautifully carried out. From the lift hall, along the corridor to the stairway the marble panelling continues.

In the general office of the company, beauties of Western Australian jarrah are shown to advantage. The whole of the walls to a height of five feet are panelled in polished jarrah, above which rises the marble, in black and white, each of the piers being finished with bronze caps. The polished jarrah counter is also a beautiful and sound piece of workmanship. The floor is carpeted with rubber. The manager's and sub-manager's and other offices are also panelled in jarrah and the floors are of parquetry. Except for the main window and show case, all steel frames in outer walls are glazed with 'Wunderglaze' and all connecting doors in offices are similarly glazed in quadrille finish.

From the ground floor to the first floor, on either side of the stairs, there is black, white and brown marble panelling, to a height of about five feet. Balustrades are of cast iron of fancy design, with polished jarrah handrails.

From the first floor to the top floor, and also in the basement, in all corridors, and on either side of the staircase, there is jarrah panelling to a height of about five feet. In the offices there is jarrah rail about 4ft 6in from the floor, and higher up, a jarrah picture rail. Walls and ceilings are finished in white plaster. All floors are of parquetry.

In the basement and all floors, excepting the ground floor, there is ample lavatory accommodation. Floors are of terrazzo, walls of white tiles, wash-basins and other fittings of white porcelain enamel, and the balance of doors, walls painted white.

There are two high speed Loft Pty Ltd lifts installed, capable of 250ft per minute. They carry eight passengers each: one being dual control (having automatic buttons, and hand control), and the other gear control only. On each floor landing there are travel indicators and at what floor they are. The façade on the ground floor is of bronze, but on each of the other floors facades are of polished jarrah, in the shape of pillars, with carved caps. The cages themselves are of bronze, and doors are of similar glazing, in Quadrille style, to the ground floor windows and office doors.

Even down to the smallest details, careful consideration must have been shown. There is a bronze letter chute, with an opening at each floor, near the lift, and a clearing box on the ground floor in the lift hall. On each of the office doors facing corridors, locks have bronze finger plates upon which appears a small reproduction of a lifebuoy, with a monogram in the centre, reading "Orient Line". Outside all windows are Venetian blinds, and the steel frames of windows are painted blue, providing a striking contrast to the white stone facing of the frontage, and the cement rendering of the other walls. To ensure adequate lighting for the basement, the whole of the back and the front, for a depth of some feet, has been glazed in steel frames: plain glass at

the rear, and Flemish glass at the front. In that way natural light is obtained, making it almost unnecessary to utilise artificial light.²⁵

At the time of construction the building dominated the streetscape, being at least twice as tall as any other building in the immediate vicinity. On the parapet were the words 'Orient Line Building' in bronze lettering; since removed.²⁶ However, by the late 1930s, the building would be overshadowed by the adjacent *Gledden Building*, constructed on the corner of Hay and William streets.²⁷

The plans indicate that a model ship of the line was to be on display in a case in the front windows and there was a model displayed until the building's link with shipping was severed. The model of the *S.S. Oriana*, which occupied almost the full width of the main display window, was popular with passing children.²⁸

Tenants in the upper floors were mainly professionals, comprising a number of dentists, a solicitor, 'character analyst', estate agent and medical practitioner. This profile was largely retained for the next two decades. Australian National Airlines established an agency on the ground floor of the building in 1936 and the Perth Rotary Club took up offices on the second floor c. 1940.²⁹

After World War II, P&O's shareholding in the Orient Line gradually increased and the Orient Line lost its autonomy. The two companies joined in operations across the Pacific in 1958, operating as the Orient & Pacific Line. The two fleets officially merged on 2 May 1960 under the management of a new company, P&O-Orient Lines (Passenger Services) Ltd, usually referred to as the P&O-Orient Line. In 1964, the old Orient Line vessels were decked out in P&O colours and the new company substantially increased the number of cruises being offered to and from Australian ports in the 1960s. However, services between Australia and Britain were severely disrupted with the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 and by 1969, jumbo jets largely replaced cruise liners as the preferred means for leisure transport to Australia. P&O then concentrated on the American and European markets.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid. The building may have been one of the last commercial buildings in central Perth to be faced with stone. By the time the Gledden Building was constructed in 1937, stone was considered too costly, with synthetic stones and cement render the preferred materials. See Robyn Taylor, 'Metaphors and Meanings: The Gledden Building', in 'Deco Down Under: Art Deco Then and Now: Preservation into the Nineties: Abstracts from the Second World Congress on Art Deco', Perth, WA, 1-5 October 1993.

²⁶ Photographs in *Building and Construction Journal*, 27 June 1930, pp. 6-7.

²⁷ After construction of the Orient Line Building had commenced, it was discovered that the building on the site of the existing Gledden Building (then a two storey commercial and retail building similar to Wellington Buildings) encroached several inches into the Orient site. This delayed the construction of the Orient Line Building and ultimately led to the construction of Gledden Building. See National Trust of Australia (WA), 'Historic Places Assessment Form: former P&O Building', prepared for Art Deco Assessment Committee, January 1996.

²⁸ Personal recollection Philip Griffiths.

²⁹ *Wise's Post Office Directories*, 1931, p. 101; 1936; 1940/41, p. 99; 1949, p. 96.

³⁰ Gordon, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

Title to the property was transferred to Lear Nominees Pty Ltd of Melbourne, Victoria, on 26 April 1988, and then to Malaysian Airlines System Berhad on 22 March 1991.³¹

P&O Building (fmr) was classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) in October 1989 and nominated for entry in the Register of the National Estate the following year. It has been included in the City of Perth Municipal Heritage Inventory with a recommendation that it be considered for entry in the Register of Heritage Places. The place has also been included in the Art Deco Society's survey of significant buildings from the 1930s with the same recommendation.³²

A site visit by Considine and Griffiths in July 1991 revealed that little had been done *P&O Building (fmr)* since its completion. The upper floors and basement remained for the most part as constructed, with some floors being carpeted over, and some timber dado panelling had been painted. The lift cars had been replaced, and the shopfront and entrance doors modified, so that an entry had been made direct from the street into the front of the public hall area. In the original plan, entry had been via the entrance hall and lift lobby to the north. The steel window frames were no longer painted blue.

The building was refurbished in 1991/92 to reveal much of the original fabric that had been concealed over the preceding fifty years at ground floor level.³³ Puddy Lee were commissioned to undertake the work which involved the upgrading of toilets, re-fitting of the first through third floors, and the refitting of the sixth floor for staff amenities.³⁴ The work involved re-furbishing the front canopy, reinstating a full width shopfront, replacing the front doors, refurbishing the lifts, air conditioning, refurbishment of the toilets on all levels, the introduction of suspended ceilings to the renovated floors, new carpets to many areas, and new partitions on Floors 1-3. Venetian blinds were removed on the floors that were renovated.³⁵

In 2003, the basement is used for storage and staff amenities for the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board, the ground floor is used by the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board, the first to third floors are used by Malaysian Airlines, the fourth floor for storage, the fifth floor vacant, and the sixth floor for staff amenities for Malaysian Airlines.³⁶

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

³¹ Certificate of Title, Volume 1797, Folio 789, registered 26 April 1998; 22 March 1991.

³² In HCWA Database.

³³ National Trust of Australia (WA), 'Historic Places Assessment Form: former P&O Building', prepared for Art Deco Assessment Committee, January 1996.

³⁴ Philip Griffiths during a conversation with Lorraine Bradford, Malaysian Airlines Supervisor, on site 26 November 2003. Considine and Griffiths Architects were also invited to prepare a scheme in July 1991, but the commission was eventually undertaken by Puddy Lee (now Spowers Architects)

³⁵ Site visits by Philip Griffiths 26 and 27 November 2003.

³⁶ Site visits by Philip Griffiths 26 and 27 November 2003.

P&O Building (fmr) is a seven-storey steel framed construction office building with Donnybrook sandstone and rendered brick cladding in the Inter-War Functionalist style, constructed in 1929-1930.³⁷

P&O Building (fmr) is located in William Street, immediately adjacent to the *Gledden Building*, a Perth landmark. The building is part of a group of three Inter-War buildings comprising *Devon House*, *Gledden Building* and *P&O Building (fmr)* on the south of the street together with a fourth, *Economic Stores (fmr)*, on the north side of the street, that visually terminate a whole street block of buildings related in style and time that form a visually cohesive whole. The Hay Street Mall contains an important collection of late nineteenth century and pre World War II buildings of a similar scale and mostly created within a period of forty years. The *Devon House*, *Gledden Building* and *P&O Building (fmr)* group terminates this collection at its south-west corner.

William Street is a wide carriageway with four lanes of traffic, barrier kerbs and standard City of Perth exposed aggregate 400 x 400mm concrete pavers. There are outreach pole-mounted street lights and no street plantings in this section of William Street.

The building is built up to its front boundary, extends from boundary to boundary across the front of the lot, and is set back from boundaries outside this area to allow natural light to all rooms. It is a 'T' shaped plan.

The front elevation comprises a tall ground floor, similar to the heights used for institutional buildings, then five storeys of the same (lower) height, then a plain cornice stepped parapet that conceals the former caretaker's flat. The ground floor's generous height was designed to impress, and its classically derived internal Chicagoesque styling, with pilasters and coffered ceilings, gave the public space dignity and prestige. This approach to design was characteristic of banks, insurance companies, and shipping lines. The whole of this façade is clad with Donnybrook sandstone, except around the main entrance. The ground floor has a large centrally located display window in bronze frames, with the main entrance to the north and a grille gate that provides access to the side and rear on the south side. There is a grey granite plinth that extends across the whole of the front façade. The entrance door has a matching granite architrave and sill, with timber construction pivot doors with bronze finger plates, kick plates, and bars. The central window is set over a stone sill which is surrounded by a bronze grille and then copper framed plate glass window, divided into three panels. There are two bronzed plaques, one each side of the window, with the street number on them. A framed awning extends across the window and four suspension rods support this. This is very similar to the geometry of the awning indicated in the documents, though the cladding is modern. A stone cornice completes the top of the ground floor. The next four floors are composed around a forward thrusting bay over the main window, with flanking bays. There are four windows in the width of the forward bay and one in each of the flanking bays. Each window is a pair of small pane casement sashes of 10 panes per leaf made of steel construction and clear glazed. A fine cornice terminates the fourth floor, and then another set of windows follows. There is a deep cornice

³⁷ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Roberston, North Ryde, 1989. pp.185-188.

over these windows, with a stepped parapet over the cornice topped with flag pole. The remaining elevations are treated simply, with rendered masonry walls, repetition of the use of the same windows that were used on the front of the building, hoods over the windows. The basement has a light well to it set under the rear part of the 'T' plan, and this is lined with white vitreous china tiles. A steel construction stair leads down into the basement from the service area. There is a steep steel construction escape stair on the south side of the 'T'.

The plan comprised a ground floor entrance hall and set of two lifts to the north side of the building, and a principal stair to the rear of the lift. There is a public office in the centre of the ground floor plan, and to the south an access way to the rear yard. Typically the upper floors have a 'T' shaped plan with the top of the 'T' extending across the whole of the lot boundary, a set of male and female toilets in the rear south-east corner and a steel escape stair to the south of the east leg of the 'T' plan.

The ground floor entrance lobby comprises a set of restored timber entrance doors, terrazzo floor, panelled two tone marble dado, and upper walls clad in white marble, a later detail. A pair of copper repousse clad lifts face into the entry, with a copper clad lift entrance portal. All the details are classically derived, but given an Inter-War Chicagoesque interpretation. A Malaysian Airlines logo has been applied to the new marble upper wall over the lift. The lift cars have been upgraded and are now timber panel lined, rather than the cages described in the documentary evidence. Pilasters extend through the dado to the coffered ceiling and these are clad in dark marble, with copper repousse cappings that employ bead mouldings, egg and dart mouldings and a line of dentils. The ceiling is divided into panels or coffers and the coffers' perimeters are decorated with dentil and egg and dart motifs in the classical manner. In the southern wall a new entrance has been made to the adjoining public hall space, using a similar design language to the lobby entrance doors, though the materials are predominantly timber. The staircase to the rear of the lift has a marble dado that matches the entrance lobby, and this extends to the basement and first floor level, where it then turns into a panelled timber dado. The stair is carpeted concrete and has a stoutly detailed metal balustrade and newels in the Functionalist style. The main public hall now functions as the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board and the 1991 conversion work saw the indented shopfront on William Street removed and replaced with the present shop window, designed in the style of the original building's architectural language. The room has a rectangular plan, without the faceted eastern end of the upper floors, to allow light into the ground floor and basement areas. The ground floor has no toilets and the principle space occupies the whole of the rectangular plan. The space is a single ground floor room with a partitioned area to the rear, a flight of timber construction steps to the north-east and a mezzanine floor that is a very late addition to this space. The walls are clad with modern shop fitting panels and these mask the perimeter pilasters to a point just below the capitals and the ceilings follow the same coffered pattern as the entrance lobby. The mezzanine is made in framed construction with a long glazed wall facing into the main space. Timber architraves made in traditional Malaysian designs are

fitted around this panel and around the front window of the building. Air conditioning cassettes are suspended off the mezzanine.

The first floor is one of five floors with the same basic plan, though the internal fit out and finish varies from floor to floor. The first to third floors have been fitted out to suit the needs of Malaysian Airlines ticketing and administration. Floors are carpeted. The floor plan is divided up with new plasterboard lined partitions, and new suspended ceilings have been introduced. The toilets have been retained in position throughout, but the entrance doors to the toilet changed to separate male and female toilet entrances. The interiors have been completely retailed and new fittings put in place. Steel framed windows and plastered walls are retained throughout. The staircase with its timber panelled dado remains as originally detailed throughout. Lift lobbies have been upgraded with original details such as the glass fronted mail chute on the north wall retained intact, together with service duct access doors in the office spaces and in the staircase. Timber parquet floors have been retained and restored in a number of areas, while other areas are carpeted, and may still retain the parquet under the carpet.

The fourth and fifth floors are not in use other than for storage and have been left in a state much closer to the original concept, with timber portals to the lift doors, timber dados (now painted), the glass faced mail chute, panelled and glazed doors with original bronze door hardware with 'Orient Line' stamped on finger plates, timber skirtings and the steel framed windows. On the fourth floor a suspended 'lay in' ceiling has been installed. On the fifth floor, the original plastered beam and slab soffit remains exposed, with picture rails, dado rails and herringbone pattern timber parquet flooring. Some skirtings have been removed. The dados, doors and other joinery have been left as a varnished finish, which is the original detail.

The sixth floor steps back from the building frontage and rear and the external areas created by the stepped back plan are open decks, now covered with trafficable tiles. The caretakers flat is now a simplified space, with a large open area immediately south of the service core with new glazed doors opening on the decks to the east and west, and a new kitchen and toilets to the south of this area. The finishes, apart from the staircase apart, are all new.

The basement has a similar plan to the ground floor, but the plan extends out under the William Street pavement and would have been lit with patent pavement lights, though these are either completely covered over or have been removed. The plan is divided into two large rooms to the front and rear, with a room under the pavement and a set of male and female toilets in the centre of the building, a later addition. There are roller shutters along the entire east façade that have been installed to combat break-ins. The ceilings are simply plastered soffits and beams and this is the original detail. The walls are plastered and there is some timber dado boarding remaining on the north side of the building. Floors are carpeted and the original moulded timber skirtings remain in place.

Alterations include the loss of basement pavement lights, the upgrading of toilets, the replacement of the front entrance doors and shopfront, cladding of the upper wall of the lobby in white marble, the lining out of the ground floor

public space, together with the inclusion of a mezzanine and air conditioning, and the re-fitting of the first to third floors and sixth floor.

The exterior of the building, apart from the basement area is well maintained and in good condition. Fourth and fifth floors are in fair condition. The remaining floors are well maintained and in fair to good condition. The fourth and fifth floors are more intact than any other floors and although not maintained regularly, are in fair condition. There is some moisture penetration through the street over the alignment of the pavement lights and some damage caused by water penetration through the fifth floor and sixth floor.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Until the 1930s, architecture in Perth was essentially based on British examples, with some influences from America (most notably the Californian Bungalow) and the Mediterranean (eg. *Hackett Memorial Buildings* at the University of Western Australia). During the post-Depression years, these styles were largely replaced by Art Deco, which was already well established overseas. By 1939, there were many buildings in Perth in the new, modern style, whether these were new buildings (such as the *Gledden Building*, *Emu Brewery* and a considerable number of cinemas) or remodelled older buildings (including a number of hotels and commercial buildings). Influences for such buildings were imported largely from America and reflected functional aesthetics and a beauty based on primary geometric forms, and were associated with the new technological age with its emphasis on engineering and industry.³⁸

P&O Building (fmr) represents the transition of Perth's architecture derived from traditional British influences to that of the modern style, largely imported from America. *P&O Building (fmr)* is stripped of elaborate detail externally and reflects something of the functionalist style. The ground floor interior is more akin to Chicagoesque style characteristics

The architects

Other multi-story commercial buildings designed by Hobbs, Smith and Forbes at the time included:

- *Willhelmsen Building* (Dalgety & Co fmr), 11 Cliff Street, Fremantle (two storey Federation Free Classical style building completed in 1902) (RHP 0854)
- *Royal Insurance Building*, St George's Terrace (five storeys; completed 1930)
- *Goldsborough Mort & Co Building*, St George's Terrace (4 floors with basement; completed September 1929)
- *Imperial Hotel*, Wellington Street (five storeys with basement; under construction 1929)

³⁸ Robyn Taylor, 'Images of Modernity in Perth's Architecture during the 1930s', in David Bromfield, Melissa Harpley & Pippa Tandy (eds), *Aspects of Perth Modernism 1929-1942: A catalogue for the exhibition organised by Julian Goddard and the Centre for Fine Arts*, University of Western Australia, Centre for Fine Arts, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1986, pp. 25-28.

P&O Building (fmr) represents a shift in the style of the work produced by the architects, away from the language of classical architecture with its rich decorative use of elements such as pilasters in Classical orders, plinths, deep cornices, architraves around openings, entablature and balustrades, pediments and the like. Indeed, *P&O Building (fmr)* is a very stark and stripped down exterior with the articulation of the forward setting of the centre bay, stepped parapet, awning, entrance and regular window pattern creating the visual interest, devoid of applied decoration other than the granite trims to the plinth and entrance architrave.

Intactness

Many of the buildings in the Hay Street mall retain a good deal of the exterior detail, though most have had their ground floor shopfronts and entrances substantially altered. All have been painted since their construction. Some of the buildings have had their ground floor to upper floor access altered and a number have had upper floor access removed altogether or the access reduced to steel escape stairs. *P&O Building (fmr)* remains unpainted, the shopfront has been altered and then returned to something close to its original detail. It retains its original lift arrangement, original stairs and some original office partitioning. This degree of intactness is rare in the Hay Street Mall context where the pressure for change has impacted on so many buildings.

P&O Building (fmr) is a fine example of Hobbs, Smith and Forbes work in the Inter-War period and is remarkable for its degree of intactness.

13. 4 KEY REFERENCES

No Key References

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH
