REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

HERITAGE COUNCIL
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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.

11. 1 AESTHETIC VALUE[*]

The simple, attractive and quirky proportions and detail of *Original Railway Station, Geraldton* forms an important element in the streetscape. The timber detailing in the wrap around verandah contributes to the aesthetic appeal of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

Located in a park setting, in one of the main streets of the town, the prominent, two-storey form of *Original Railway Station, Geraldton* has a landmark quality in Geraldton. (Criterion 1.3)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

The Geraldton-Northampton Railway system demonstrates the importance of rail transportation in the development of the state. (Criterion 2.1)

As one of the two stations on the Geraldton-Northampton Railway line, *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* played an important role in providing transport services for the ore from the Murchison mineral fields to the port at Geraldton during the 1870s. (Criterion 2.1)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton was the first railway station constructed on a Government line in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton is significant for its long association with Geraldton Mechanics' Institute (now the Geraldton Cultural Trust), an important organisation in Geraldton's educational, recreational, artistic and cultural life, past and present. (Criterion 2.2)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton is significant for its role as part of the Geraldton Branch of the Western Australian Museum, the third such branch museum established in the State. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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[*] For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* North Ryde NSW, Angus & Robertson 1989.

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11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Original Railway Station, Geraldton is highly valued by the local community. The retention of the place as a public library, and later as a branch of the W A Museum, supports this. (Criterion 4.1)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton contributes to the local community's sense of place, first in its role in transport, and later in its recreational and educational roles as a public library and a museum. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Although difficult to interpret, *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* is a rare structure as the place provides some physical evidence of the only surviving early station on the oldest Government railway line in the State and of the location of the original station in Geraldton. The remains of the other early station at Northampton are extant as an archaeological site. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The place is a reminder of the early transport system and development of Geraldton. The concrete verandah along Marine Terrace was once the station platform and provides evidence of a time when railway tracks ran along Marine Terrace. (Criterion 6.2)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton is representative of a process of building adaptation involving a significant change in function. Substantial changes in form, style and construction have been incorporated successfully into a unified expression. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton is in good condition and a review of the maintenance programme is carried out regularly. As a regional branch of the Western Australian Museum, continuous use, public accessibility and regular maintenance of the place have been ensured.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Evidence of the early function as a train station is not obvious in the physical fabric, requiring an interpretative effort to link to the original structure. The current use as a museum is compatible with the former public library function but is unlikely to be continuous. *Original Railway Station, Geraldton* has low integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

There have been substantial alterations to the fabric since construction of the single-storey railway station. Since the addition of second storey, the place has retained much of the form and outward appearance with some internal modifications to suit changing functional requirements. There have been alterations to the rear verandah enclosures and extra facilities have been added behind the building but these could be removed with little detrimental effect. *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* has moderate authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton was originally a single-storey stone building with a shingle roof, constructed in 1878, as the Geraldton terminus on the Geraldton-Northampton railway line. A second storey was added in 1909, when the place was leased for use as the Geraldton Mechanic's Institute and public library.

Geraldton developed as a port for the Murchison mineral fields to the north, and a centre for the rich pastoral and agricultural lands in the Victoria district. The first lead deposit was discovered in 1848, and the Geraldine Lead Mine opened the following year. It was named by Governor Sir Charles Fitzgerald after his family home, Geraldine House, in Kilkeo, County Clare.[1] According to the Municipality of Geraldton's 1950 centenary publication, the township of Geraldton took its name from the mine.[2]

Geraldton was surveyed in November 1849, and the first 40 town lots went to auction in June 1850.[3] The harbour was originally known as Port Grey, after Captain George Grey who explored the area in 1839. It was renamed Champion Bay, after H. M. Colonial Schooner *Champion*, which transported Governor Fitzgerald and his wife, and explorer and Assistant Surveyor Augustus Gregory, to the area in 1849, and which also transported the first settlers and a detachment of soldiers to the new township, in 1850.

In 1852, a port was established closer to the mineral fields at Port Gregory with the help of convict labour. A Ticket of Leave hiring depot set up there provided labour for the mines and the pastoralists. In 1861, however, Port Gregory was closed as it was found to be unsafe for shipping, and the convicts were transferred to other areas.[4]

Geraldton grew steadily. The Geraldton Hotel was built in 1862, and Henry Gray, a farmer from Greenough, opened Gray's Store, which was the point of departure for the wagon teams that serviced the Murchison district at this time. In 1867, the Court House and Bond Store was opened and the Rectory was constructed. On 19 June, 1868, the Working Men's Club was formed, and in 1871 the Geraldton Town Trust was incorporated to administer the town.[5]

Better transport and communications between Geraldton and the mines was required, and agitation for a railway had begun as early as 1859. With the closure of Port Gregory the need was even more acute. In 1864, the township of Northampton was established in the southern part of the Murchison fields, about 34 miles north of Geraldton. This was considered the ideal destination

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[1]   *The First Hundred Years: Geraldton Centenary 1850-1950* Municipality of Geraldton, [1950], pp. 5-7.
[2]   ibid.
[3]   ibid.
[4]   ibid, p. 10.
[5]   ibid, pp. 14-16.

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for a railway line to the mines. One person active in these efforts was Charles Crowther. He wrote:

> The North is a milch cow for the South. We want a steamer, and nothing less than a steamer. We want a railway to Northampton mines. We want the telegraph[6]

In 1872, the new Legislative Council called for an engineering survey from Champion Bay to the mines. The survey was carried out by James Major, of Melbourne. His plans provided for a railway line of 33 miles 66 chains, with grades up to 1 in 10 and a gauge of 3 feet with iron rails of 35 pounds per yard. The cost was £87,704 and included all rolling stock, buildings and ancillaries.[7]

The tender for the construction of the line was given to James Palmer of Melbourne, for £50,000, and the first sod was turned on 22 October 1874, by Governor Weld.[8] However, cost of construction blew out and the Government appointed a Select Committee to investigate, chaired by James Lee Steere. The Committee tables its report on 21 December 1875. The report claimed that Mr Major had designed and costed a 3' railway line, but once he had obtained the contract, he had arranged with Surveyor-General Malcolm Fraser to alter the gauge to 3' 6". No one informed the Government of the change at the time.[9]

In his progress report of 21 July 1876, Government Engineer James Thomas stated that:

> the change of gauge of 3' 6" had been a big mistake. Apart from the extra cost, all railway experts regarded three feet to be the best gauge below 4' $8_{1/2}$". It was not possible to do anything about it so the standard gauge for the Colony must now be 3' 6".[10]

In February 1875, James Major died and was replaced by D. Lovell as consulting engineer. He condemned the engineering standards of his predecessor and insisted on new standards. The result was another increase in cost and delay in time.[11]

Tenders for the railway stations at Geraldton and Northampton, to be constructed to the same design, were called on 9 April 1878.[12] The stations were possibly designed by Clayton Mason, resident engineer for the Geraldton-Northampton Railway between 1877 and 1879, but have also been attributed to R. R. Jewell in his capacity as architect for the Public Works Department.[13]

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[6]   ibid, pp. 23-24.
[7]   Suckling, A. J. 'The History of the Northampton District' Teacher's Higher Certificate Optional Thesis, bound typescript, c. 1963, Battye Library, p.123; *Geraldton & Northampton Railway Specifications of Work: General conditions of contract, etc.* Gov Printer, Perth [1874].
[8]   Suckling, A. J. op. cit., p.123.
[9]   Austin, J. M., 'Construction of the Geraldton-Northampton Railway', *Western Rails*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1979, p. 7.
[10]   ibid.
[11]   Suckling, A. J., op. cit., p. 126. ; *The First Hundred Years*, op. cit., p. 23.
[12]   *Western Australian Government Gazette* 9 April 1878, p.88.
[13]   National Trust classification details, 1967.

The tender was won by G. Heal & J. Cornish, of Geraldton, with a price of £1,278/7s/8d.[14] The foundation stone is reported to have been laid by Mrs Maitland Brown, the wife of the member for Geraldton, on 21 August 1878.[15] According to the annual report of the Director of Public Works, tabled on 24 July 1879, 'Geraldton station was finished and tenders had been accepted for the Northampton railway station and telegraph office', making *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* the first railway station built in Western Australia. The Geraldton-Northampton Railway line was officially opened on 26 July 1879, by Governor Ord.[16]

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton functioned for only 15 years before being replaced, in 1893, by another station further north along Marine Terrace. The new station was required when the main shipping wharf was relocated from Gregory Street to Durlacher Street as a result of the increased traffic caused by the opening up of the Murchison goldfields. In 1915, this building was replaced by a third station further north on Chapman Street.[17]

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton was vested in the Geraldton Municipal Council and occupied by the Geraldton Mechanic's Institute and Public Library, probably in late 1906.[18] An editorial in the *Geraldton Guardian*, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone for the new Town Hall in January 1907, states:

> It may be interesting to record that the municipality has acquired an old landmark and relic of the early days in possessing the building now used as a public library, which was the first railway station in the state.[19]

This was the Institute's third home. Known as the Geraldton Working Men's Society between 1868 and 1901, the Institute had been granted £10 and Geraldton Town Lot 224 by the British Government, which encouraged such organisations for the betterment of the working man. The land was about three roods in size (approx. 0.3 ha), with frontages of one chain (approx. 20 metres) on Marine Terrace and Eleanor Street and five chain (approx. 100 metres) on Durlacher Street. This was a prime location that in later years provided the Institute with a steady income that helped it continue. In 1871, the Institute opened the Workingmen's Hall and Library on the site.[20]

By 1882, Institute membership was reported to be 130 and its property was valued at £700. The combination of hall, library and reading room was not entirely successful however, and in 1897, a new library was built on the Durlacher Street frontage and the original building let as a hall.[21] However, on 18 January 1900 the new library, a timber building, burnt down. The fire

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14   *Western Australian Government Gazette* 28 May 1878, p.132. **Note**: the name is spelt 'Comish' in the *Government Gazette*, but *The Herald W A Almanac & Commercial Directory* 1873-1879 editions give the name as James Cornish, builder. There is no entry for a 'Comish'. Tanya Suba also has the name as 'Cornish' in her Municipal Inventory report.
15   *Geraldton Express* 11 August 1915, (no p.n.).
16   Suckling, A. J. op. cit., p.129.
17   *Geraldton Heritage Trail* W A Heritage Commission, p.17.
18   *Geraldton Guardian* 29 January 1907, Editorial, p. 2.
19   ibid.
20   Candy, P. C. & Laurent, J. (eds.), *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institute & Schools of Arts in Australia,* Adelaide, Auslib Press, 1994, p. 141-144.
21   ibid.

started in the kitchen of Mrs Pead, the caretaker, who lived on the premises. Only a few books and most of Mrs Pead's furniture were saved. Insurance cover of £300 on the buildings, £50 on the fittings and £100 on the books only partially covered the loss.[22]

The Institute returned temporarily to the Workingmen's Hall. To assist it re-establish its library, the Government provided a subsidy of £50 towards the purchase of new books, and the Geraldton Municipal Council provided the disused railway station as the Institute's new premises. On 8 August 1900, the new library, believed to be the first free library outside Perth, was opened in *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton.* According to the newspaper report of the occasion, the Mechanics' Institute 'had generously handed over' its books and papers for public use. A fee of one shilling per quarter was charged to those who wished to borrow books. Present at the opening was Maitland Brown, an original member of the Institute. He stated that the Institute's committee intended to spend £50 a year on new books.[23] Mrs Pead continued her role of caretaker and librarian at the Institute's new home in *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton.*[24]

The lease arranged between the Council and the Mechanic's Institute allowed for a peppercorn rent. The original lease was to be for twenty one years but, in December 1908, the Secretary of the Mechanic's Institute wrote to the Council requesting that the lease be extended to thirty years as the Institute wished to 'carry out a building scheme for the purpose of providing increased accommodation' in *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton.*[25] This arrangement was formalised on 9 July 1909.[26] In October 1909, plans were submitted to Council for the proposed extensions. These plans were accepted unanimously when Council was informed that work on the extensions had already commenced.[27] During this work the concrete railway platform was trimmed back level with the sides of the building to form the floor of the front verandah.[28]

The Institute provided a public library, and meeting and reading rooms for the people of Geraldton. The arrangement was beneficial to both parties. The Mechanic's Institute was free to rent out its own premises in the town centre and further develop that site, making it a valuable asset and income provider, while paying a peppercorn rent for *Original Railway Station, Geraldton.* In addition, Geraldton Council was able to have library services provided for its residents at minimum cost to itself. This arrangement also meant that the Mechanics' Institute now had funds available to assist in the fostering of the arts and cultural activities in Geraldton.

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[22]   *Geraldton Express & Murchison and Yalgo Goldfields Chronicler,* 19 January 1900, p. 3.
[23]   Candy & Laurent, op. cit.; *Geraldton Express & Murchison and Yalgo Goldfields Chronicler,* 10 August 1900, p. 7.
[24]   *Wise's Post Office Directory,* 1893-1910; *West Australian Almanack & Directory,* 1868-1890.
[25]   Minutes of Geraldton Municipal Council meetings, 8 & 21 December 1908, Battye Library, Microfilm ACC 1634.
[26]   Candy & Laurent, op. cit.,
[27]   ibid, 18 October 1909.
[28]   Rohan, P. & Wilson, H. H. *Geraldton Sketchbook* Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, p.14; photographs 1879, No. 21568 Battye Library, & 1970, HCWA File PD1068. (See supporting material)

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton gets a mention in Randolph Stow's well-known, semi-autobiographical book, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea.* In the section titled '1941-1945' he writes:

> He went, scuffing leaves, to the merry-go-round...His mother was in the Library, getting books. He could see her now, coming out onto the verandah. The Library was a big place with an upstairs. It used to be the railway station in the Old Days, which made it very old indeed. In fact, everything about the merry-go-round was old...[29]

Further alterations were made to *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* some time between 1937 and 1970, with the addition of verandahs and balconies to the sides and rear of the building.[30] According to Candy and Laurent, these renovations were carried out in 1957.[31]

In 1960, the Mechanic's Institute changed its name again, to the Geraldton Cultural Trust, which better reflected its activities. On 31 July 1968, the Geraldton Public Library was opened in the newly constructed Civic Centre. In 1953, Geraldton Council had advised the Government that it wished to participate in the State Library Scheme and the new library was a result of that participation. The Mechanics' Institute continued to provide library services for its own members.

The Trust terminated its lease of *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* in October 1975, and returned to its own premises with its stock of 10,000 books.[32] In 1982, it took over the Residency, which was originally built for the Government Resident Magistrate in 1865, and first occupied by Maitland Brown in that capacity. The Trust rented the building from the Works Department for a peppercorn rental, using it as a centre for cultural, artistic and community groups.[33] The following year, the old Workingmen's Hall was destroyed by fire and was demolished to make way for new development on the site.

In 1993, the Trust controlled 23 tenancies with capital value in excess of $1.7 million. Income from the properties is used to maintain the Residency and the members' lending and reference library, to maintain and improve Trust properties, and to provide accommodation and grants to the various groups the Cultural Trust supports.[34]

In 1979, *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* was taken over for renovations by the Public Works Department to become part of the Geraldton Branch of the WA Museum. The WA Museum, under the Museums Act 1975 provides considerable assistance to local museums and historical societies, and has an active policy to decentralise and establish branch museums. The first branches to be established were the Fremantle Museum, which opened in 1970, and the Albany Museum, which opened in 1975.[35]

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[29]   Stow, Randolph *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.2.
[30]   Photographs, 1937, *Geraldton: Then and Now* 1989, Geraldton Camera Club, p.11, & 1970, HCWA File PD1068. (See supporting material)
[31]   Candy & Laurent, op. cit.
[32]   *Geraldton Guardian,* 25 June 1975, p. 3; Candy & Laurent, op. cit.
[33]   *Geraldton Heritage Trail*, HCWA, p. 25; Candy & Laurent, op. cit.
[34]   Candy & Laurent, op. cit.
[35]   *Annual Report of the Western Australian Museum, 1979/80*, p. 56.

In 1973, the Geraldton Maritime Museum, also on Marine Terrace, had been established with State assistance. This museum was originally managed by the Municipal Council. On 1 December 1980, the WA Museum officially took over the running of the Geraldton municipal museum, thus establishing its Geraldton Branch.[36] Funds to fit out *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* for its new function were not available, however, and over the next few years, the place was only opened for special exhibitions on International Museums Day, or used for an occasional seminar or temporary exhibit by local organisations. During 1982 and 1983, work on the production and installation of display cases, lighting and bookshop facilities were carried out, but there were no funds available to install permanent displays or employ attendants.[37] *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton* was not officially opened as a fully functional museum until December 1985 when it was opened by Premier Brian Burke.

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton houses displays on the natural and cultural heritage of the Geraldton Midwest region. The activities of the Museum cover display, education, curating, collecting, research, and information and advice. Its aim is to provide access to the services and resources of the Western Australian Museum for residents and visitor to the Midwest region and adjoining areas.[38] There is strong support from local and Perth-based businesses, with 40 providing sponsorship for projects in 1995/96. Of the 12 temporary display exhibited in that year, three were produced locally.[39]

With the closure of the Geraldton-Northampton Railway line in 1957, and the subsequent removal of the lines, the railway stations are all that remain of the first Government Railway line constructed in Western Australia.

In the event of the Geraldton Region Museum moving to other premises, the Arts Council of Geraldton has expressed an interest in leasing *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton*.[40] The place does not appear to be under any threat.

13. 2   PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton is located on the ocean side of Marine Terrace, Geraldton. The two-storey building displays characteristics of varying styles due to the distinctly different eras of construction. The ground floor is predominantly characteristic of the Victorian Georgian style although substantial alterations to the building after the initial period of construction have introduced elements from the Federation period.[41] The site is surrounded by parks with well established and prominent trees, to the east and west. A merry-go-round is adjacent to the Moreton Bay Fig tree to the west of *Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton*. Recreated in 1988, this

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[36]   *Annual Report of the Western Australian Museum, 1980/81*, pp. 4 & 56.

[37]   *Annual Report of the Western Australian Museum, 1981/82*, p. 36; and, *1982/83*, p. 35.

[38]   *Annual Report of Western Australian Museum, 1987/88*, p. 31; *1991/92*, p. 54.

[39]   *Annual Report of Western Australian Museum, 1995/96*, p. 59.

[40]   Letter, Arts Council of Geraldton, 9 January 1996, HCWA File P1068.

[41]   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. 42-45.

piece of playground equipment replaces an earlier structure which was mentioned in this location in the book, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*.[42] The railway reserve runs close to the rear boundary separating the site from the beach. Some small sheds providing storage and toilet facilities are located within the fenced area behind the main building.

Original Railway Station (1878-93), Geraldton has a simple orthogonal form. The lower floor of the place is constructed in rendered stone. Timber verandah posts skirting the concrete verandah support the second storey balcony and corrugated iron verandah awning. The second storey walls are constructed in fair-faced brickwork utilising both Flemish and stretcher bonds, with a stucco band at door head height. A stucco chimney protrudes through the corrugated iron, hipped roof which has small gables in the east and west elevations. A gable pediment with a decorative timber finial is located in the central bay of the upper floor emphasising the main entrance.

Verandahs are located on the south, east and west elevations with noticeably different treatment between the two levels. The St Andrew's Cross balustrade at ground floor contrasts with the vertical balusters at upper floor. Similarly, the timber fringes employ subtly different detailing with an arched valance to the verandah awning beneath the roof and a shallow solid valance across the central bays at the ground floor. The intention of the different detailing is unclear but may reflect the different time periods and methods of construction.

Joinery is of standard timber construction with sash windows encasing large panes of glass, timber panelled doors and louvred shutters to the front windows. There are some aluminium framed windows in the additions at the rear of the building.

The museum is entered from Marine Terrace with a short set of concrete stairs up to the verandah level from the brick paved footpath. A ramp for disabled access is located on the west side of the building, adjacent to the external timber staircase leading to the upper verandah. Narrow window openings are situated either side of the main door which has a glazed panel above. A glass enclosed portico is immediately behind the front door providing a secondary entrance into the museum reception area and display gallery. Staff offices are located on the east side of the ground floor with kitchen, work area and staff facilities along the north in additions of lightweight construction. The timber floor is carpeted and walls are generally plastered and painted with modest cornices at the ceiling junctions. High timber skirtings are evident in select locations.

A timber panelled staircase leads to the display gallery at the upper floor. Artificial lighting has been provided as some of the external openings have been obscured by display cases. Two turned timber posts with triangular brackets supporting a beam which runs across the width of the ceiling, are situated against the north and south walls. The remaining accommodation at first floor is for staff use with a meeting room to the east and storage and dark room facilities to the north. The verandah provides fire escape access.

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[42]   Stow, R. *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* Penguin Books, Victoria, 1968, pp. 1-2.

The current building is substantially different to the photographic evidence of the Original Railway Station in style, size and function. The single-storey station had a pitched shingled roof with gable ends to the east and west and circular vents in the apexes. The concrete platform on the south side of the building indicates that the railway line once ran along Marine Terrace. The western end of the building had a concave, striped corrugated verandah awning, and picket fence and a gate. After the railway station moved to a new location further north in the town, and the building was occupied by the Mechanics Institute, a second storey was added. By the 1920s photographic evidence shows the place in much the same form as the current structure. There were additional timber finials as skyline features and weatherboard enclosures along the rear verandahs at the upper floor. Modifications to the external fabric in the adaptation to a museum include the addition of extra accommodation at the rear of the building and the construction of a fire escape stair from the upper verandah and a concrete ramp for disabled access on the south elevation. Internally, openings in the ground floor gallery have been enlarged and a new timber panelled stairwell has been inserted. A dark room has been created in the north-west corner of the upper verandah.

The building is in good condition and a regular maintenance programme is in place.

13. 3   REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 4   FURTHER RESEARCH