HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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

Railways Institute Building, with its generous proportions, arcaded red brickwork and stucco detailing, has aesthetic value for its demonstration of the late Victorian Romanesque Revival style. (Criterion 1.1)

Railways Institute Building has significance for its creative design of an elaborate two-storeyed northern facade, which provides protection to the facade of the building and acts as a transition between the street and the interior. (Criterion 1.2)

Railways Institute Building makes a strong visual contribution to its section of Wellington Street, and is recognised for its contribution to the aesthetic and historic character of the northern end of the King Street Heritage Precinct. (Criteria 1.3, 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Railways Institute Building has historic value as it was designed, constructed and enlarged by the Public Works department for the offices of the Metropolitan Water Supply Sewerage and Drainage Department. The building, in conjunction with other buildings on the site, housed the Chief Engineer and staff for the Government Railways, before it was later used as the Railways Institute. (Criterion 2.1)

Railways Institute Building has significance for its association with the architectural designs of the Chief Government Architect, Hillson Beasley. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Although *Railways Institute Building* was occupied by the Railways Institute for only a short period of time it is now identified with the many workers institutes established in the nineteenth century to offer moral, intellectual and social improvement for workers through the

provision of reading rooms, recreational facilities and workshops. (Criterion 4.1)

The building contributes to the fabric of Perth as an element surviving from a former phase of development. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

The architectural character of *Railways Institute Building*, in particular its two-storeyed arcaded facade, is rare in central Perth. (Criterion 5.1)

Railways Institute Building is an uncommon, surviving example of an office building built specifically by Government for a Government Department - the Metropolitan Water Supply Sewerage and Drainage Department, and dating from the first decades of the twentieth century. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Railways Institute Building is a fine example of Beasley's favoured late Victorian Romanesque Revival style applied to an office building, rather than a public building. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The restoration of the place under the direction of Duncan Stephen and Mercer, Architects, has resulted in *Railways Institute Building* being in sound condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The effect of alterations and additions to the exterior of the building, although significant, are largely superficial. The interior spaces are largely intact but have suffered loss of integrity due to insensitive installation of services. The current restoration has removed later accretions to reveal earlier details and finishes.

The use of the building as commercial offices retains the original function of the place. *Railways Institute Building* , therefore, has a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The modifications carried out over the years to *Railways Institute Building* have largely involved the addition of new materials rather than the removal of original fabric. The building retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The building at 591-605 Wellington Street, now known as *Railways Institute Building*, was first occupied by the Metropolitan Water Works Board.[1]

The Board was first housed, in 1897, in an office at 299 St George's Terrace, Perth. The Board consisted of the Mayor of Perth and three persons appointed by the Governor, the appointees at that time being, Edward Keane, Thomas Wall Hardwick and Joseph Talbot Hobbs.[2]

From 1898 to 1909, the Board was located at 591-605 Wellington Street, between Donaldson & Collins: aerated water and cordial manufacturers; and, T. C. Kinninment: agent and importer. As no occupant is listed in the Postal Directory between these two business premises prior to 1898, it can be concluded that a new building was constructed in Wellington Street during 1897 to house the Board.[3] At the rear of the building there were also the horse drivers' and caretakers quarters, and stables and coach house which have been recently demolished.[4]

In 1910, the Postal Directory lists 605 Wellington Street, as the address of the Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage. With an expanded role for the Board came the need for an expanded bureaucracy and the Board's building was enlarged in 1910, to a design that repeated Beasley's original building. In 1911, the Board's name was changed to the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Department to reflect its expanded role. However the Department did not occupy the building for long.

Between 1914 and 1922, the building was occupied by the Department of State Land Taxation. The Railways Department (the Chief Engineer of the Way and Works Branch and associated staff) occupied the building from 1923 until 1976, when the department was transferred to the new 'Westrail Centre' in East Perth.

In December 1979, the Railways Institute moved into the building. The Credit Union occupied the ground floor fronting Wellington Street and, in March 1980, the Railways Institute Club opened new licensed premises on the first floor.

In 1992, the State Government decided to develop inner city housing on the surrounding site, and as part of the development the *Railways Institute Building* has been restored and adapted for use as commercial offices by Homeswest. Work was completed in 1995.

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1 Le Page, J. S. H. *Building A State.*

2 Postal Directory (1897).

3 Postal Directories (1898 to 1909).

4 See Kornweibel, R. *The Physical Condition of the Railways Institute Buildings Wellington* Street *Perth* (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, Perth, 1992), p. 1., for site plan.

Railways Institute Building is located at the northern end of the King Street Precinct, a heritage precinct classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) in 1981. The precinct has been entered into the Register of the National Estate and is also recognised as a significant group of heritage buildings by the Perth City Council, and is entered into the Fifth Schedule of the City Planning Scheme.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Railways Institute Building is a two storey building constructed for the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Department, and built in two stages: the western section circa 1897 and the eastern extension in 1910.

The 1897 building was designed by the Public Works Department under the guidance of the Chief Architect, Hillson Beasley. The robust architectural character is expressed in red brickwork with stucco decoration (now painted), in the Romanesque Revival.

The 1910 extension doubled the size of the building, repeated the original architectural form, scale and detailing.[5]

The extended Wellington Street facade is symmetrically disposed, with elaborate two-storeyed arcading providing protection to the northern face of the building. The arcade also acts as a transition between the street and the interior.[6] The thickening of the central pier indicates the junction of the 1910 extension.

The lower level has a recessed wall plane framed by an arched verandah of segmented arches on brick piers. The original, faced brickwork featured stopped chamfered edges to the piers, rendered bands, arch mouldings and pier capitals.

The upper level repeats the arched recessed facade with half round arches on paired rendered columns and capitals above brick pedestals. The balcony is protected by a decorative masonry balustrade. The Wellington Street facade parapet is supported by corbelled arches, with rendered cornices between truncated pilasters on the column lines.[7]

The east elevation consists of four evenly spaced double hung windows at both levels. At some stage the upper level windows were bricked in although, the window outline is evident due to the presence of reveals. The south wall, where exposed, indicates original openings and double hung sash windows.

A modern single-storeyed verandah has been built along the eastern wall of the building, with timber framing and pitched corrugated galvanised iron roofing. The verandah links an early external toilet block to the building. A modern steel external stair has been added at the southern end of the building.

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5 *ibid.*, p. 8., for copy of PWD drawing, 10 October, 1910, for east portion of the Wellington Street facade.

6 *ibid.*, p. 7, for photograph of the Wellington Street elevation.

7 *ibid.*, cover page, for copy of PWD drawing of Section AA, cross section through building.

The pitched roof, gabled at the south end and hipped at the north end, is sheeted with corrugated galvanised iron. Gutters and downpipes are in galvanised sheet iron. A brick parapet extends along the western edge of the roof.

The internal spaces are largely intact with deep cornices, high skirtings and a dado mould to the entry lobby. Some doors are original with full timber reveals, wide ribbed architraves and original brass door furniture. Fireplaces have been blocked off and a service window built in between the entry lobby and the first room on the right of entry.

The staircase is of generous proportion and spans three flights. The newel posts are well carved in a draped leaf decoration and support jarrah handrails in a continuous wreath. Balusters are cast iron interspersed with steel rods.

Over the first flight and supporting the first floor landing is a wide flattened arch supported by italianate fluted brackets. The underside of the staircase is enclosed with tongue and grooved boarding on studwork and glazed panels. Termite activity on the glazing frames has damaged this particular joinery beyond repair. There is also evidence of termite attack on the skirting at the first landing.

The stairwell is top lit with a glazed ceiling level skylight. Although it is not shown on any of the 1910 drawings, the style of the skylight would suggest it dates from that period. Recently an aluminium safety mesh has been fixed below the skylight. Other than this, the staircase, stairwell and surrounds are essentially in original form.

The area to the eastern side of the building has been significantly altered, although current restoration work may reveal if the original details and finishes are in place. Drawings of this area show a deep ceiling cornice and tapered cast iron columns which may be intact, although covered by a suspended ceiling and plywood panelling.[8] The area represents one of the few remaining large office spaces of this period.

The eastern section of the interior on the upper level has also been altered: a suspended ceiling, partitions, fireplace closures and screen walls obscure evidence of the original finishes.

The upper balcony, or 'piazza' as it is referred to on the original drawings, has been enclosed to form additional office space. The arched openings now contain timber window sashes, the balustrade has been panelled over, the ceiling has been lined and many of the original french doors removed.

The western section of the building remains unchanged, with full height ceilings and original cornices and other mouldings being intact. The original upper level floor tiling is intact, matching that in a similar position on the lower level.

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8 Restoration has revealed the ceiling intact, although the 'cast iron' columns are RSJ steel columns which are now painted.

The ledger lift to the basement and the stairs to the cellar have been removed and replaced with a trap door and steps. The condition of the cellar appears sound and dry.

The current restoration and adaptation of the *Railways Institute Building* into offices by Duncan, Stephen & Mercer, Architects, has removed these later accretions and revealed earlier details and finishes. The integrity of the interior has remained intact except for the south-west corner room on the ground floor level which is to be converted to female toilets and male toilets directly above on the upper level.

13.3 REFERENCES

Bodycoat, R. 'Railways Institute Buildings' (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, Perth, 1993).

Kornweibel, R. 'The Physical Condition of the Railways Institute Buildings, Wellington Street Perth' (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, Perth, 1992).

Suba, T. 'The Railways Institute Building' (for the Heritage Council of Western Australia, Perth, 1992).