



**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 November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### **PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)**

- 2.4.5 Changing the face of rural and urban Australia through migration
- 4.1.5 Developing city centre
- 4.3 Developing institutions
- 6.1 Forming associations, libraries and institutes for self-education
- 7.6.6 Providing services and welfare
- 8.10.4 Designing and building fine buildings

#### **HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)**

- 101 Immigration, emigration & refugees
- 307 Intellectual activities, arts & crafts
- 401 Government & politics
- 402 Education & science
- 404 Community services & utilities
- 405 Sport, recreation & entertainment
- 407 Cultural activities
- 605 Innovators

#### **11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\***

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is a fine and innovatively designed example of Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style architecture, valued for the 1970s contemporaneous design that contributes to the townscape and identity of the town of Northam. (Criterion 1.1)

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\* 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Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* has a classical elegance and symmetry with vertical emphasis of the columned facades, creating a building that is both visually striking and has presence. (Criterion 1.1)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* typifies the form, scale, materials and sculptural design of the architect Iwan Iwanoff. (Criterion 1.1)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is valued by the community of Northam and district for the significant contribution to the townscape and character of Northam. (Criterion 1.4)

## **11.2 HISTORIC VALUE**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* was constructed for the Northam Town Council in the early 1970s when Western Australia was experiencing a general period of growth and prosperity in the agricultural, industrial and mining sectors. (Criterion 2.1)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* signified Northam's position as an important post World War Two regional centre. The Town Council Offices served the civic administrative needs of the growing Northam Township from May 1974 to July 2007, when the Town and Shire amalgamated, while the Library continues to function as the first public library facility for the Town and Shire. (Criterion 2.2)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* was designed by highly-regarded immigrant architect Iwan Iwanoff, who practised in Western Australia from 1951 to 1986 and was originally associated with the firm of Krantz and Sheldon. Iwanoff is particularly well known for his innovative concrete block houses of the 1960s to 1980s. (Criterion 2.3)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is significant as an example of technical and design excellence for its exuberant and monumental exterior form in concrete block construction and its creative interior use of light and space. (Criterion 2.4)

## **11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* has some scientific significance for its capacity to teach about aspects of the durability and design possibilities of concrete block construction. (Criterion 3.1)

## **11.4 SOCIAL VALUE**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is valued by the local community, as demonstrated by its inclusion in the Northam Municipal Inventory, and is one of only a handful of post World War Two buildings so valued by rural communities. (Criterion 4.1)

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is valued by the local community for its associations as a place of local government administration and as an education and passive recreation facility. (Criterion 4.1)

The building is symbolic of Northam's changes in the second half of the 20th century, and contributes to a sense of place for residents of the town and district. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1 RARITY**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is a rare example of Iwanoff architecture in a regional or institutional application.

## **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is a very fine and unusual example of Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style and a typical and fine example of the concrete block work of architect Iwan Iwanoff.

## **12.3 CONDITION**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is in good condition having been in use since construction. Regular maintenance has been undertaken.

## **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* has retained a high degree of integrity, demonstrating continuous use for the purposes as designed. The Town Council Offices has undergone some internal alterations over the years, but that has essentially involved office layouts and refurbishments within the building. The Library has had a new stairway installed to the mezzanine to facilitate the function of the place but this alteration is not obvious and has not detracted from the overall style of the building.

## **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

The original fabric of *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is mostly intact. There is minimal evidence of intervention to original fabric. *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* has retained a high degree of authenticity.

## **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Irene Sauman, Historian and Laura Gray, Heritage and Conservation Consultant, in April 2008, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

### **13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* comprises two double-storey concrete block buildings consisting of the Library (1971) and Town Council Offices (1974) constructed in Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style to a design by architect Iwan Iwanoff.

The first Northam council offices were located in the 1904 additions to the 1898 Town Hall on the corner of Wellington and Gordon streets. The building provided a Council Chamber, Mayor's parlour and offices for Council officials.<sup>1</sup> Library facilities were provided in the Mechanic's Institute in Fitzgerald Street.

In 1906, the Town acquired the title to Northam Town Lot 18, which is part of the site of the current *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam*. Northam's first power station was located on Lot 18. The station had been built for the Town by Splatt, Wall & Co and opened on 9 September 1901. In 1903, the plant was

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<sup>1</sup> Garden, Donald S., *Northam: An Avon valley history*, OUP, Melbourne, 1979, p.158; Palassis Architects, *Conservation plan Northam Town Hall, Northam*, 1994.

doubled in size.<sup>2</sup> At that time the roadway now known as Beavis Place was named Glebe Street.

Northam, as with most regional towns in the wheatbelt, grew noticeably during the 1920s during the agricultural expansion and accompanying population increase of the period. In May 1928, a new Council office building was opened beside the power station and in 1932 the Municipality acquired the title to the adjoining Town Lot 17.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately following World War Two, consideration was given locally to amalgamating the Town Council and Road Board authorities to avoid duplication of resources and services. A sub-committee recommendation for amalgamation was accepted by the Council but rejected by the Road Board amid fears 'the interests of Road Board ratepayers would be submerged beneath those of the more numerous town residents'.<sup>4</sup> In February 1949, a Royal Commission on Municipal Boundaries recommended amalgamation but no action was taken. Further deliberations eventually agreed to an extension of Municipal boundaries and in 1957, the Town Council area was more than tripled by the addition of the Mount Ommaney-North Northam region and a large area on the south-west of the town stretching out to the race course. The Road Board, and later the Shire from 1961, made grants to the Town Council to assist in the provision of amenities and facilities used by the residents of both local government districts.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, the State experienced considerable prosperity from the agricultural and industrial sectors and there was prospective development in the mining industry. Northam Town Council took the decision to build a new civic administration centre with council offices and public library to cater to its growing population and its position as a regional centre. A Library Committee was formed in July 1968 and various sites were considered and other library buildings, including the Bentley Library, were inspected. It was decided that the existing Town Council office site and adjoining Lot 17 were the most suitable for *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam*, being centrally located and already owned by the Town. To push the project along, Cr Alex Risco, at his own expense, engaged architect Iwan Iwanoff to prepare a model and design brochure for the proposed buildings, which Cr Risco then presented to the Town Council meeting on 17 December 1968. The model was of a library building with curved side walls located at the rear of a rectangular two-storey office building. The library was proposed as Stage 1 of the project.<sup>6</sup>

After the meeting Mayor C. T. Beavis spoke of the model as the accepted design. He was reported as saying that 'the presentation of firstly the brochure had softened the council's attitude towards the project; presentation of the model was the final clincher in getting council into action'. Mayor Beavis described the proposed design in detail, stating that the Library would have the ability to expand with an additional floor and that library shelves would be curved to accommodate

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2 Garden, op cit, pp. 162-63; Certificate of Title, Vol. 357 Fol. 138, 8 October 1906.

3 Garden, op cit, p. 217; Certificates of Title, Vol. 458 Fol. 180 & Vol. 1028 Fol. 822, 11 April 1932.

4 Garden, op cit., p. 250 & various *Northam Advertiser* references.

5 Garden, op cit., pp. 250-51.

6 Information from Town Council minutes held at Northam Shire office, courtesy Northam Librarian Wendy Porter; The Studio of Iwanoff - Architect, 'Proposed Northam Public Library and Northam Municipal Chambers', presented to the Town Council meeting on 17th December 1968, Iwan Iwanoff private archives, Battye MN 1401 ACC 4401A Items 270/1-3.

the curved walls. The second stage of the project would involve the two-storey Town Council Offices.<sup>7</sup>

The scale model of *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* was displayed in a Fitzgerald Street shop for public comment.<sup>8</sup> No reports of comments were found in the local newspaper or in Council records, which suggests that the majority of people at least had no objection to the design. At the Council meeting of 18 February 1969, it was decided to formally offer the design commission to Iwanoff.<sup>9</sup>

Iwan Iwanoff had migrated from Bulgaria in 1950 and was initially employed by the architectural firm of Krantz and Sheldon, which was established in the early 1930s and employed some 39 nationalities of migrant architects and draftsmen over the years. Harold Krantz was a nephew of Perth architect, Harold Boas, and Robert Sheldon (who had changed his name from Schläfli) was a Jewish-Viennese émigré who had fled Nazi Europe. The firm made a significant contribution to the architectural history of Western Australia. They pioneered 'European' styles in a state in which all other architectural firms were 'English'. Iwanoff became a well-known architect in his own right from 1963, when the Architects Board of WA accepted him as qualified to practice as an architect. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1972.<sup>10</sup>

Iwanoff submitted his draft plan to the Town Council in August 1969 and was authorised to continue with the work.<sup>11</sup> In November 1969, Council sanctioned several loan proposals, including \$45,000 toward the Library construction, 'aimed at forcing a start on this constantly postponed project'. It was expected that the loan would be partially offset by the sale of the Mechanic's Institute on Fitzgerald Street for \$30,000 to Firestone Stores Pty Ltd, but the sale did not go through. The Shire Council covered the shortfall by providing a grant of \$15,000 a year for the next two years for Town amenities. Many Shire ratepayers objected to this amount, but they eventually accepted the situation, believing it was the only way to avoid amalgamation with the Town.<sup>12</sup>

In December 1969 it was decided finally to call tenders for construction of the Library with additional loan funds to be raised for the project. It was reported at the time that:

In design, the library will be the most up-to-date and picturesque building in Northam, with special consideration for climatic and geophysical conditions. Certain alterations have been made to the original plans to make the building earthquake-proof.

It will be double-storey of natural grey concrete surrounded by lawns, gardens and a parking area with space for at least 50 cars. The main entrance will face Glebe St., but access will only be provided from Fitzgerald St until the present council offices have been replaced.

A feature of the building will be specially designed panel windows set between concrete columns along the west and south walls. The windows will be angled so that

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<sup>7</sup> Information from Town Council minutes held at Northam Shire office, op cit; 'Council makes a positive move for library in Northam', *Northam Advertiser*, 19 December 1968, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Northam Advertiser*, 19 December 1968, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Information from Town Council minutes, op cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Knowit*, official newsletter of the State Library of WA, July-Aug 2002, no. 260, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Information from Town Council minutes, op cit.

<sup>12</sup> *Northam Advertiser*, '\$90,000 for Burwood Park and Library projects', 6 November 1969, p. 1; '\$15,000 grant stirs shire electors' meeting', 8 January 1970, p. 1 & '\$85,756 tender accepted for Library at Northam', 19 March 1970, p. 1.

books inside do not receive the direct rays of the sun. The columns will help to strengthen the structure.<sup>13</sup>

On 12 March 1970, the tender of Cooper & Oxley Builders Pty Ltd, for \$85,756, was accepted.<sup>14</sup> Cooper & Oxley was a construction company formed in Northam in 1952 by T. L. (Tom) Oxley and R. A. (Bob) Cooper. In 1973, the Company established an office in Subiaco and extended its operations to the metropolitan area and other country regions of the state. Their later projects include: the refurbishment of the Perth Mint; the Midvale Velodrome; the West Australian Newspaper Ltd printing plant at Herdsman Park; Perth Children's Court; the WA College of Advanced Education, Mt Lawley; the 5-level Silverton Apartments in Mount Street, Perth; and, the 100-unit Homeswest development in Bennett Street, East Perth.<sup>15</sup>

Work began immediately on the site, which was to the east of the existing council offices, and several old buildings were removed within the week.<sup>16</sup> Additional contracts were let to Cooper & Oxley for landscaping (\$1,838.95) and furniture (\$7,792.30). This latter must have entailed little more than the shelving and the loans desk, as the architect, Iwanoff, and the librarian, G. V. Hubble, were responsible for selecting additional items of furniture including reading tables and chairs, easy chairs, office desks and chairs, vertical file cabinets, table and chairs for the staff room, chairs for the workroom, catalogue cabinet, step stool, and table and chairs for the children's library.<sup>17</sup> The book stock was provided by the State public library system. The final cost of the Library was \$109,000.

Northam Library was opened on 2 April 1971 by the Mayor of Northam, C. T. Beavis. Present at the opening ceremony were: Deputy Mayor, C. R. Roediger and councillors; Shire President, A. J. Antonio and councillors; H. D. Evans, Minister for Lands Agriculture & Immigration representing Premier John Tonkin; Les Diver MLC, president of the Legislative Council; Ken McIver MLA for Northam; R. Arnold, Chief Librarian, City of Melville; J. E. V. Birch, Director of Cultural Services, City of Fremantle; and Professor Fred Alexander, former Chairman of the State Library Board. Professor Alexander spoke at length on the value of the Library for the residents of Northam.<sup>18</sup>

The opening of the place was considered by Mr Beavis to be a part of the centenary of Local Government celebrations. He thanked the architect, Iwanoff, 'whom he said had produced something outstanding and unusual, and something which he believed was unique within Australia'.<sup>19</sup> A small metal sculpture by Hungarian born artist Peter Gelenscer had been commissioned for the building by the architect and was installed on a concrete pedestal in the main reading room. The sculpture represented 'striving upwards'. It was planned to place a time capsule in the pedestal at some later date.<sup>20</sup>

Deputy Mayor, C. A. Roediger invited Mayor Beavis and his wife to be the first members of the new Library and presented Mr Beavis with a library book

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13 'Council to call library tenders', *Northam Advertiser*, 8 January, 1970, p. 1.

14 *Northam Advertiser*, 19 March 1970, p. 1; Information from Town Council minutes, op cit.

15 'Cooper & Oxley: People-driven', *Construction Industry Yearbook*, 1995, pp. 10-11.

16 *Northam Advertiser*, 19 March 1970, p. 1; Information from Town Council minutes, op cit.

17 *Northam Advertiser*, 13 March 1971, p. 3.

18 *Northam Advertiser*, 8 April 1971, pp. 1 & 4.

19 *Northam Advertiser*, 8 April 1971, p. 4.

20 *Northam Advertiser*, 8 April 1971, p. 4; information provided by Northam Librarian Wendy Porter.

'Australia's National Parks' so that he could also be recorded as having been the first person to borrow a volume from the Library. At the conclusion of the formal ceremonies, refreshments were provided at the Town Hall.<sup>21</sup>

Library staff included the librarian, G. V. Hubble, and three library assistants. In the first year of operation of the place, 56,623 books were issued to the 3,124 registered members. An extension service to hospital patients was also instigated. Its procedures were noted during a visit to the Northam Library by State Library Board representative Ron Davies, to pass on to other libraries that wished to start a similar program.<sup>22</sup>

Town Council moved ahead with the raising of funds for Stage 2 of the project, and for the 1971-72 financial year it included an amount of \$150,000 in its loan programme to Treasury for construction of the Town Council Offices.<sup>23</sup> Another loan of \$70,000 from the AMP Society was also taken up. There were murmurs of dissent among ratepayers at the levels of borrowing and at the \$250,000 estimated cost of the Town Council Offices.<sup>24</sup>

When the State Superannuation Board offered staged loans totalling \$250,000 for the project, Council considered taking up the first stage offer of \$100,000 for July 1971, which, together with the \$70,000 AMP Society loan already in hand, could be sufficient for the project if they were able to reduce the cost. Changes were proposed to the interior layout of the building to reduce the outlay to \$175,000. Mayor Beavis warned that in making a decision in the matter of what was included or left out of the administration building, 'it should be remembered that it would be required to serve the requirements of the local authority for the next 100 years'.<sup>25</sup>

Iwanoff made changes to his design and the new concept plan for the Town Council Offices was adopted on 15 July 1971. The changes eliminated air-conditioning and some of the refinements of the original plan while keeping the original dimensions of the building. A referendum of ratepayers was called for 31 July for approval to raise a \$100,000 loan for the work. Only 605 of a possible 4,500 votes were cast, and the result was a 'No'.<sup>26</sup>

The result of the poll was a disappointment to many. Councillors and many ratepayers believed that a lack of detailed information regarding the loan had resulted in its rejection. In September 1971, Northam Chamber of Commerce urged the Council to resubmit the proposal to the people. A special committee, comprising Councillors J. C. Andersen, J. A. Izzard, J. K. Little and C. E. Roediger, was appointed to consult with the architect and look at alternate means of accommodation, taking cost into consideration. The Committee recommended construction of the Town Council Offices with costs kept to \$175,000 including

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21 *Northam Advertiser*, 8 April 1971, p. 4.

22 *Northam Advertiser*, Northam Public Library's first annual report to Council, 8 June 1872.

23 *Northam Advertiser*, 4 March 1971, p. 1.

24 'Council to study alternative administration building plan', *Northam Advertiser*, 22 June 1971.

25 'Council to study alternative administration building plan', *Northam Advertiser*, 22 June 1971.

26 *Northam Advertiser*, 'Maximum of 4500 votes for Saturday's loan poll', 29 July 1971 & 'Poll overwhelmingly rejects \$100,000 Council loan', 5 August 1971.

furnishing and landscaping, and that a second referendum of electors be held on the matter on 20 November.<sup>27</sup>

A petition against the loan was signed by 157 residents who feared a rate increase if the loan was sanctioned. At the new referendum, 22% of a possible 6,274 votes were cast, resulting once again in a 'no', albeit with a reduced margin. At the next Council meeting, it was decided that the finance committee should investigate the possibility of alternative accommodation for council staff, as the situation in the present offices was unworkable. Cr Izzard pointed out that the traffic inspectors were using a shed that had been almost blown away during a recent meeting in the place.<sup>28</sup>

In May 1972, the local ALP branch entered the argument over the Town Council Offices loan, and wrote criticising Council for trying to raise a loan for a civic centre and administration building, stating that approval from residents would be forthcoming if it restricted the loan to just providing the administration building. The Mayor was quick to point out what he called 'muddled thinking', as Council's Stage 2 plans had always only been for an administration building with never a consideration for a civic centre – the Town Hall still filling that purpose.<sup>29</sup>

At a special meeting of the Northam full Council on 21 November, it was made known that the AMP Society loan of \$70,000 had already cost \$5,172 in interest payments without being put to any use. The Town Clerk, J. Bowan, presented a plan for a single-storey administration building costing \$67,000. Council put the plan to a committee and began looking at the possibility of renovating the Lesser Town Hall as offices. This was considered by many a retrograde step and a waste of funds, particularly should the Town and Shire councils eventually amalgamate.<sup>30</sup>

At the annual meeting of Northam ratepayers on 21 December 1972, a plan to renovate the Lesser Town Hall for office accommodation at a cost of \$18,000 was withdrawn from the agenda and a proposal to build the first of a three-stage plan for a civic administration building was put forward instead. The first stage was to comprise a single-storey building containing '35 squares of air-conditioned office space', at a cost of \$66,000. This would in effect be the ground floor of the original design, with modifications to allow two upper floors to be added at a future date. The seventy ratepayers present at the meeting voted in favour of the project, using the loan monies already available.<sup>31</sup>

This was not the final word in the matter, however, as at the following Council meeting on 27 December, Cr J. K. Little pointed out that both the Town Hall and Lesser Town Hall were the results of staged projects that had never proceeded past stage 1, and he urged that the Town Council Offices be built with all necessary conveniences and needs as 'it could be a very long time before the new building gained additions'.<sup>32</sup> There appears to have been a concerted effort to achieve this as in July 1973, Council proudly announced that it had managed

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27 *Northam Advertiser*, 'Civic administration centre loan to be resubmitted', 30 September 1971, p. 1; 'Council administration centre: referendum advocated', 21 October 1971, p. 1; 'Council unanimously sanctions electors' referendum', 28 October 1971, p. 1.

28 *Northam Advertiser*, 25 November 1971, p. 1.

29 *Northam Advertiser*, 25 May 1972, p. 1.

30 *Northam Advertiser*, 30 November 1972, p. 3.

31 *Northam Advertiser*, 28 December 1972.

32 *Northam Advertiser*, 4 January 1973.



to reduce its overdraft by \$80,000 from \$99,309, which made it possible to borrow another \$50,000 toward the project. Iwanoff provided, yet again, further modified plans for a fully air-conditioned two-storey building and the tender of Cooper and Oxley of \$116,242 was accepted for the construction.<sup>33</sup>

Town Council Offices was officially opened on 4 May 1974. Unlike the long running controversy over the financing of the place, which invariably graced the front page of the *Northam Advertiser*, the opening was afforded only a small item on page three.<sup>34</sup>

The ceremony was held under in a large marquee erected for the purpose due to the heavy rain. A plaque was unveiled by Mayor Fred Killick in front of about 200 guests, including: many present and former-town councillors; former town clerk George Christmass; former Mayor C. T. Beavis; Minister for Local Government R. C. Rushton; Minister for Health, N. E. Baxter; Senator Tom Drake-Brockman; Northam Shire Council president, A. J. Antonio; Shire clerk E. C. Molyneux; headmasters of Northam schools; senior local officials of the Main Roads and Public Works Departments and the State Electricity Commission; Northam Post Master, J. F. Miles; Sergeant of Police A. Ammon; Northam clerk of courts, S. A. Armstrong; staff of the builders Cooper & Oxley, and the architect Iwanoff. In most instances the men were accompanied by their wives. The 72m square, two-storey building was described by the health minister as a magnificent building and a bargain at the price.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the alterations and economies made to the plan over several years, the finished structure bore close similarity to the model presented to Council in December 1968, reinforcing the earlier indication that there had been no strong objections to the design.

When the Library was established it held 5,000 books. The small horseshoe shaped loans desk, designed by the architect, was located beside the foot of the stairs that accessed the mezzanine level. As the book stock and membership grew, this area became crowded and unworkable. Under current Librarian Wendy Porter, a larger loans desk, some three times the size of the original, was installed and the stairs were redesigned to allow for this. The Peter Gelencser sculpture was moved to provide more useable space on the lower floor, and its concrete pedestal was broken up to ascertain if a time capsule had ever been installed that required reburial, but none was found. The metal sculpture, which is between 40cm and 50cm in height, and heavy, presently lies on its side on the mezzanine floor to prevent children pushing it over and injuring themselves.<sup>36</sup>

The Library currently holds 18,000 books and loan items. Further expansion of bookshelves is restricted by the angled walls. The building is considered a beautiful structure but no longer adequately serves the function for which it was built.<sup>37</sup> The Town Council Offices functioned well but also faced internal alterations over time with increasing staff numbers and changed practices to service a growing population. In July 2007, the Northam Town and Shire finally amalgamated. A new Shire Council was established and the Town Council Offices were vacated in favour of the Shire offices, six hundred metres away on

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33 *Northam Advertiser*, 12 July 1973, p. 1.

34 *Northam Advertiser*, 9 May 1974, p. 3; *West Australian* 6 May 1974, p. 14.

35 'Mayor "streaks" to open new office', *Northam Advertiser*, 9 May 1974, p. 3.

36 Information provided by Northam Librarian, Wendy Porter.

37 Information provided by Northam Librarian, Wendy Porter.

Fitzgerald Street, which were able to accommodate the combined staff of both administrations. The merger provided cost savings and provided a stronger central administration for the region.<sup>38</sup>

In 2008, the Town Council Offices are vacant and under consideration for leasing or sale. The Library continues to be utilised for its original purpose but has been outgrown for current needs.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* comprises two free standing adjacent buildings that are the double-storey concrete block Town Council Offices, and the double-storey concrete block Library, both showing influences of Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style and architect Iwanoff's distinctive concrete block sculptural design.

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is located on a site adjacent to the Avon River, at the southern terminus of Heaton Avenue, on the corner of Fitzgerald Street and Beavis Place, at the south-west end of the commercial strip of Fitzgerald Street. The two buildings are set back a considerable distance from the Fitzgerald Street frontage, the Library further back than the offices. They have a shared rear alignment, with the front setback area forming a car park accessed from Fitzgerald Street. The Offices also have a Beavis Place frontage, with vehicular access and an expansive asphalt car parking area accessed off the end of Beavis Ave at the Heaton Avenue juncture, parallel to the Avon River, and the north-west side of the Library and Offices. Along the south-west end of the car park is a steel framed multi-bay carport. The area between the river and the car park is lawn down to the riverbank.

The Fitzgerald Street front views of *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* are partially obscured by various plantings within the intervening landscaped and grassed area in the vicinity of the Fitzgerald Street and Beavis Place corner. The sculptural form of the library building is barely discernable from the street due to plantings within the car park between the building and Fitzgerald Street. Similarly, plantings also obscure an 'in the round' view of the Town Council Offices, although the front elevation, aligned symmetrically with the clock tower located on the Fitzgerald Street boundary, provides an almost uninterrupted view of that frontage. However, the entry into the Town Council Offices is located on the north corner of the building, off Beavis Place, an entry that is obscured from view in Fitzgerald Street. Except for the asphalt car parks and concrete pathways, the site is mostly grassed with rose gardens, flowerbeds around the offices building perimeter, and plantings. The plantings are predominantly intrusive to appreciation of the sculptural form of the buildings.

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is predominantly in the Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style, evident in its bold use of concrete, large blank wall sections and angular, blocky character of styling. It also shows some influences of the Late Twentieth Century Stripped Classical style. Typical of the style, is the symmetrical massing that creates a fundamental classical composition. The repetitive rhythm of the column-like elements to three sides, except the blank north-west wall, of the Town Council Offices, and similar walls of the Library, are typical of the style, together with the sense of monumentality that

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<sup>38</sup> Merger Study Report [www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/Publications/Docs/CLGMergerStudyNortham](http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/Publications/Docs/CLGMergerStudyNortham) and information from the Office of the Minister for local Government.

is achieved particularly on the Fitzgerald Street frontage of the Town Council Offices. The Library is considerably more expressive of the influences of the architect, in the sculptural forms of the sweeping curved front and rear walls, and curved roof although sculptural relief design within the concrete block construction is integral and evident in both buildings. The Town Council Offices evidences the sculptural elements in the central front (Fitzgerald Street) that are separate from the main façade, and include the foundation stone in a sculptured form plinth element, and along both side walls as a relief geometric design above each of the vertical recessed window panels, between the vertical block column elements.

The Northam Town Council Offices are a substantial presence on the site, although the setback and landscape lessen the streetscape impact of the place. A compact rectangular box form, the vertical column-like elements dominate the exterior. The front façade particularly features closely spaced vertical elements with the central sculptural vertical entrance statement as a separate façade to the main wall behind. The central element highlights the crest on the horizontal parapet behind. The north-east and south-west walls feature vertical concrete block pilasters with recessed vertical panels of windows and wall infills between. A horizontal concrete block parapet terminates the vertical columns, but extends the recessed panels with decorative geometric block work above each panel. The access to the building on the north-east side, in the north corner, is recessed with a flat roofed canopy in a curved configuration, similar to the form of the Library walls. The suspended entry over the porch is a flat roof with a varnished timber soffit. The roof curves back into the entry door that is recessed beyond flanking face concrete block columns.

The interior of the Offices is mostly open plan with a block of services along the central interior. The main staircase is located immediately inside the main entry, where it returns along the south-west wall (Library side) and onto a landing along the south-east side. The ground floor reception area accesses a corridor part way along the north-east side which accesses open and defined partitioned office spaces that extend around the perimeter of the building on the north-east, south-east (Fitzgerald Street frontage) and south-west sides. The central core is a face block element that has been painted, and includes ablutions, kitchen and an internal staircase with closed tread stairs and a simple timber rail fixed to the adjacent block walls. The first floor similarly has a corridor on the north-east side leading through to the Council Chambers across the entire Fitzgerald Street frontage of the building. The south-west side is also partitioned offices.

The interior is a painted face block structure of the perimeter walls and central block. All other walls are partitioned elements. The concrete floors are covered, the ceilings are suspended with all contemporary office lighting and service requirements. The main staircase is an open tread timber structure with a single horizontal timber balustrade that is also evident across the top landing. The foyer ceiling features recessed panels of geometric timber elements and opaque glass lighting elements. The entry doors are recent automated aluminium framed glazed doors with fixed side panels. Internal doors are flush panel. Windows throughout appear to be the original metal-framed fitout within vertical panelled sections. The Council Chamber features an expansive timber ceiling detailed in panels similar to the foyer. The adjoining kitchen facility is a recent fitout.

The Library is a sculptural element that is somewhat impacted by the surrounding context. In contrast with the formal monumentality of the adjacent Town Council

Office Building, the Library features curved concrete block walls with integral sculpted elements, particularly evident on the 'rear' Avon River frontage wall on the north-west and the front entry area. Although most of the front (Fitzgerald Street) wall evidences a strong verticality with concrete block columns, they are subdued by a horizontal base and parapet. The strong verticality of the columns on the south-west wall is also contrasted with horizontal elements, but the main wall on the south-west, behind the vertical columns, is strongly vertical as it zigzags along. The north-east wall of the Library replicates the main walls of the Town Council Offices immediately adjacent and linked by a concrete form loggia that indicates a likely former opening in the Town Council Offices. The Library entry is unobtrusive, on the north-east wall.

The entry doors and windows throughout are aluminium framed. The Library is an expansive interior space rising to a double volume for the most part, with an open mezzanine along the south-west and an enclosed mezzanine along the north-west, with service areas beneath on the ground floor. The interior walls are painted face concrete block, the floors are concrete, the expansive curved ceiling is finished in a roughcast finish with suspended lighting that is likely associated with the original fitout. The mezzanine stairs are open tread timber on a steel frame with a security mesh subsequently fixed over the vertical steel balusters that has a simple timber rail. The balustrade to the open mezzanine is as for the staircase, with vertical steel balusters with steel security mesh fixed over. The enclosed mezzanine is a timber-panelled partition. The verticality of the windows and structural elements is evident on the ground floor frontage, and in the open mezzanine where the roof curves to the highest point in the south corner and the south-west wall zigzags along with the windows facing due south and the walls facing west, with the grid like column structure separate on the exterior. The regular engaged piers along the rear (Avon River - north-west) wall, limits the book storage as demonstrated by the narrow shelving that has been installed between the piers. The ceiling in the vicinity of the entry is detailed with varnished timber boarding and some sculptural concrete block elements are evident on the adjacent wall, likely the reverse of the detail on the exterior wall.

The clock tower is a square face brick column with the square face clock fixed onto the south-east side to read in both directions in Fitzgerald Street. At the base of the clock column is a faceted low face brick wall with bench seats fixed on the Fitzgerald Street side and a rose garden behind. The clock column is aligned with the centre of the Town Council Offices.

### **13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION**

Iwan Iwanoff was born in Bulgaria in 1919, and began architectural studies at Munich University in 1941. Towards the end of his course, a project to design a chapel in the Bulgarian mountains, was so well regarded by his architectural tutors that they asked him to proceed to the design of the decorative schema of the building, including the detailed design of wall murals, as his final design thesis. After graduation Iwanoff worked for two years in Munich from 1948 to 1950 with the architect Emil Freymuth, during which time the two were successful in obtaining second prize in the architectural competition for the rebuilding of the central city area in Munich. In 1950 Iwanoff and his wife Linda migrated to Western Australia and he took up a position with the architectural firm of Krantz

and Sheldon. He painted the wall murals on the 1956 Krantz and Sheldon designed Playhouse Theatre in Perth.<sup>39</sup>

While employed at Krantz & Sheldon, Iwanoff retained the right to undertake private projects and his private records list his first house design in 1950. With the exception of the year 1960-61, which he spent working in Melbourne with Yunken Freeman Architects and on a visit to Germany, Iwanoff worked for Krantz & Sheldon from 1950 until the mid 1960s when he was legally able to establish his own practice in WA under the name *The Studio of Iwanoff*.<sup>40</sup>

In an important and obvious sense Iwanoff's work is an extremely pure example of the potentials and tendencies of modern architecture, which includes an on-going interest in organic expressionism. In particular the virtuosity that Iwanoff displayed in his manipulation of *interior space*, his ability to give modest interiors qualities of variety, interest and delight, places his work well within the canon of modern architecture. His work, (as well as the work of other European migrant architects, such as Julius Elischer, who were his contemporaries) will, in time, be established as a significant body of modern architecture, with a character and orientation of its own, a character that is important for not being shaped by the British modernist connection that influenced so many Western Australian architects and so much post World War Two Western Australian architecture.<sup>41</sup>

[His concrete block designs, in particular] the concrete block houses that most people think of when the work of Iwan Iwanoff is discussed, represent the synthesis of many, probably most, of Iwanoff's architectural orientations. They represent an exuberant transcendence of the limitations of the Western Australian architectural environment through the creative energy of design... Iwanoff in the concrete block houses has taken the limitations of budget, acceptable forms, materials, climate, and through creative effort has drawn richness out of every aspect of the utilitarian.<sup>42</sup>

The HCWA database contains six places attributed to Iwanoff. Five are houses – the Cottesloe home of sculptor Peter Gelencser, Iwanoff House in Floreat, and three in Dianella. The sixth place is *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam*.<sup>43</sup> St Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Bayswater (1985), was also designed by Iwanoff.<sup>44</sup> Almost all Iwanoff's 200-odd design projects were in the metropolitan area. In addition to scores of concrete houses, he also designed a number of commercial and business premises, including Tiffany's jewellery shop, 635 Hay Street (1963); the WA Soccer Club rooms at the Velodrome (1968); shops and medical centre, Cnr Onslow Rd & Excelsior St, Shenton Park (1968); Miss Maud Reception & Convention Centre, Murray St (1977); warehouse & offices, Edward St Perth (1964); and showrooms & offices, Scarborough Beach Rd for Preston Timber (1967). In 1970, during the *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* project, Iwanoff designed a steak house, cnr Gordon & Duke streets Northam, for 'Izzard', possibly Northam councillor, J. A. Izzard.<sup>45</sup>

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is predominantly in the Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style. This is evident in the raw concrete construction, chunky entrance of the Town Council Offices and the monumental scale of the

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39 *The Art of architecture: the architectural drawings of Iwan Iwanoff (1919-86)*, an exhibition of Iwanoff's architectural drawings, 15 April to 13 May 1991, Alexander Library Building, Perth.

40 *The Art of architecture*, op cit.

41 *The Art of architecture*, op cit., op cit, [p. 5].

42 *The Art of architecture*, op cit., op cit, [p. 7].

43 HCWA database.

44 *The Art of architecture*, op cit., op cit, [p. 11].

45 Iwanoff private archives, Battye MN 1401 ACC 4400A, comprising many of his plans and drawings.

buildings, emphasised particularly in the bare north-west walls of the Library and Offices. The place also has overtones of Late Twentieth Century Stripped Classical style, including the overall classical elegance and symmetry and vertical emphasis of the columned facades.

The HCWA database lists 21 Late Twentieth Century Brutalist style places. Aside from *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam*, ten of these places have been identified for assessment for entry into the Register, all of which are in the metropolitan area. Two have been recommended for Registration: P956658 *Kessell House, Dianella* and P09917 *Marsala House, Dianella*, both designed by Iwanoff. The former has not been entered into the Register and the latter awaits a decision. The other eight places noted for assessment are six residences, including P14468 *ANZAC House, Perth*, and P13655 *David Foulkes-Taylor Showroom, Nedlands*.

There is one Brutalist style building on the Register, P16722 *Art Gallery of Western Australia Complex*, in which the Main Gallery Building (1979) is a comparable building. It is a fine example of the Brutalist style with an unrelieved heavy form above the ground floor entry and cafe level.

The HCWA database includes nine places in the Late Twentieth Century Stripped Classical style, of which two are on the State Register: P02239 *Parliament House and Grounds*, in which the 1964 eastern façade was designed by E. H. Van Mens of the Public Works Department, and P04571 *Perth Concert Hall* (1964), designed by Jeffrey Howlett and Don Bailey.<sup>46</sup> Both feature strong vertical elements similar to *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* but within a strictly rectangular form.

*Council House Perth* (1962) is another modern civic administration building on the State Register. It is a fine example of the Post War International style, also designed by Howlett and Bailey, but lacks the exuberance and monumental presence of *Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam*.

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* stands alone as an example of a monumental civic building in Western Australia, and is particularly unusual in any rural area in Australia where post-war administration buildings are generally relatively modest International style structures.

*Town Council Offices (fmr) & Library, Northam* is a very fine and unusual example of Twentieth Century Stripped Classical style with Brutalist elements and a typical and fine example of the unique concrete block work of Iwanoff. While the gardens and landscaping are attractive, they detract from the monumental presence and grandeur of the place.

#### **13.4 KEY REFERENCES**

No key references.

#### **13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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<sup>46</sup> HCWA assessment documentation P2239 & P5471.