



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)

- 3.7.4 Building and maintaining railways
- 4.5 Making towns to serve rural Australia

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 202 Rail and light rail transport
- 107 Settlements

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is a fine example of a substantial house in the Federation Bungalow style featuring a medium pitched roof extending over verandahs on three sides, generously proportioned rooms with fine detailing to door and window treatments and including a gracious central living room with faceted bay window on the southern side of the building. The soft orange and cream colours of the local Narrogin bricks contribute to the aesthetic quality of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

Railway House Narrogin (fmr), together with the two adjacent identical former Railway Department houses, forms a visually integrated streetscape of early twentieth century homes set in an attractive rural garden setting. The group makes an important contribution to the character of the Narrogin townscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is significant as one of three stately homes constructed in the regional centre of Narrogin for senior employees of the WAGR, the District Traffic Superintendent, the District Loco Superintendent and the District Engineer. *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* was constructed for the District Traffic Superintendent who was responsible for substantial staff in the centre. (Criterion 2.1)

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) represents the period in the early twentieth century during which the town of Narrogin developed from a small country

* 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*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

town into a town of regional significance due to its strategic location at the junction of several major rail lines. It is also a reminder of the period of development in the early twentieth century when the railways were the main transport system in the State. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) was constructed by the Railway Department of Western Australia as part of the railway infrastructure of the town. The railway was crucial to the development of Narrogin in the early part of the twentieth century and contributes to the identity of the town. As such it contributes to the Narrogin community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.12)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is a fine example of a house built by the Department of the Railways for their employees in regional centres in the early twentieth century. (Criterion 6.1)

Together with the two adjacent houses in Hale Street, *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* represents the period when the Railways Department provided staff accommodation adjacent to the railway, their place of employment. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is in very good condition as a result of continued maintenance and care. The grounds are in fair condition but are currently being maintained after a period of neglect.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) has high integrity. The building is currently leased for residential purposes and being maintained to high standard. The building is capable of long term use providing a standard of residential accommodation.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) has moderate to high authenticity. The building remains substantially as originally constructed with minor alterations including the enclosure of the verandah on the northern side and the construction of a bathroom, laundry and toilet to the rear. The back entrance to the house has been altered to accommodate disabled access with the construction of a carport and ramp. These elements however have not compromised the original fabric of the place. Internally the kitchen has been relocated, ceilings have been replaced throughout and one window opening has been adapted to a door.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Prue Griffin, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Rosemary Rosario, Architectural Heritage Consultant.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Railway House Narrogin (fmr), a single storey brick and iron residence, was built in 1913 by the Railway Department of Western Australia to accommodate the District Engineer and his family. It was one of three identical residences built adjacent to each other in Hale Street, Narrogin, to accommodate Railway Department staff.

The town of Narrogin was one of many small rural settlements established in the mid to late nineteenth century in Western Australia to service the developing agricultural industries, principally wheat, sheep and dairying. In 1889, the Great Southern Railway was completed from Albany to Beverley through the initiative of Sydney businessman Anthony Hordern and his company the W.A. Land Company.¹ The line passed through Narrogin and secured it greater prosperity. The line was privately operated until 1896 when it was sold to the State government for £800 000. An additional £300 000 was paid for the company's unsold land along the route.²

The land on which *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* stands was set aside as a Reserve in 1906 and designated for railway purposes.³ At this time Narrogin was developing from a small settlement into a significant rail centre. A new platform and station buildings were completed in 1906, new rails were laid between Beverley and Narrogin, preparatory arrangements were made for the shifting of the loco sheds from Wagin and a reservoir was constructed across the Narrogin Creek in order to provide an adequate water supply for servicing steam engines.⁴

The reasons for the selection of Narrogin as the major rail centre for the district depended on a number of factors. As Narrogin was on the major rail link between Perth and Albany it was similar to many other stations such as Wagin, Katanning or Brookton. However it was the choice of Narrogin as the location for the major branch line to the Collie coal fields in 1908 that led Narrogin become the major rail centre of the district.⁵ The development of Narrogin was noted in JS Battye's description of the town in 1912:

Narrogin was the first town on the great southern extension to become a municipality, and since that time has made considerable progress. ... combined with substantial business premises and an increasing number of handsome private residences, [it] give[s] an air of stability and permanence. Since the completion of the railway from Brunswick on the south-western line through Collie to Narrogin the town has grown considerably, and when the line from Narrogin to Merredin, already built as far as Wickopin, is completed, it will have practically direct communication with the eastern Goldfields. In addition the survey of the Narrogin-Armadale line, which it is anticipated will reduce the distance from Fremantle by 57 miles, has been authorized, so that it is confidently expected that Narrogin will in time become an important railway centre.⁶

1 O. E. Pustkuchen, *The Way Through the Story of Narrogin*, Town of Narrogin, 1981, p. 84.

2 Maurie White, *Mighty Heart Narrogin's Railway Story*, published by author, 1991, p. 14.

3 Crown Reserve 10317, Reserve Register, Department of Land Administration.

4 Maurie White, *Mighty Heart Narrogin's Railway Story*, published by author, 1991, p. 20.

5 *ibid.*, p. 22.

6 J. S. Battye, *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, 1912, p. 684.

By the 1910s, the volume of rail traffic through Narrogin had increased to such an extent that the working staff increased from 5 to 18 between 1908 to 1911.⁷ In 1913, a portion of the railway reserve on Hale Street was set aside for the construction of three large and stately homes to accommodate the District Traffic Superintendent, the District Loco Superintendent and the District Engineer.⁸ It is assumed that the homes were built by local contractors of local materials, particularly the bricks as detailed in the physical evidence.⁹

Built in exact alignment and of the same design, the three homes were of generous proportions befitting the senior rank of these officers. The significance of these buildings was recognised by the local newspapers. The *Narrogin Observer* reported on 1 November:

It is interesting to note the Railway Department has commenced building operations on the eastern side of the railway reserve. We understand that three large dwellings are to be erected at a cost of £1000 each for the accommodation of certain officers of the Department who will shortly transfer to Narrogin. With the transfer of these officers from their present station, there will also be a large number of railway employees permanently stationed at Narrogin in addition to those already here. The importance of Narrogin as a coming railway centre of the State does not diminish by the announcement of these facts.¹⁰

The first family to live in *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* was the family of Mr. R. Cresswell.¹¹ His appointment was warmly welcomed within the town for its repercussions for the building industry.

Mr. R. Cresswell, who has been appointed Resident Engineer to the Railway Department, and whose offices are at present being erected opposite the Union Bank, visited Narrogin this week, and expects to take up his residence here permanently at an early date. It is understood that the professional and clerical staff of the Engineer's Office will consist of about half a dozen officers, mostly married men who, presumably, will be requiring houses.¹²

The experiences of the Cresswell family would not have been dissimilar to the family of Mr. T. W. Peters, the District Loco Superintendent, who lived next door at number 4 Hale Street. The life of the Peters' family was recorded by Vera Harris, formerly Vera Peters, one of eleven children of Thomas and Jane Peters. The Peters family came to live in Narrogin in 1914 after many moves with the Railway Department. Vera's description of the house in 1914 would replicate *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* which was exactly the same in design:

In the combined dining and lounge room, five big windows formed a bay at one end. There was another window in the south wall and a glass door opposite opened on to a wide verandah, which surrounded the house.

⁷ Maurie White, *Mighty Heart Narrogin's Railway Story*, published by author, 1991, p. 29.

⁸ *Narrogin Observer*, 1 November 1913, as quoted in *Narrogin Sketches*, Narrogin, Observer Print., 1990, p. 46.

⁹ A search of Government Gazettes revealed no details of tenders or contracts. Annual reports of the Public Works Department and the Railways Department were also checked. Documents from the Public Records Office including Westrail files and plans and Public Works plans, files and contract books were all checked for any information pertaining to the original construction with no success. Westrail and CAMS were also contacted but could provide no information about the original construction or later additions.

¹⁰ *Narrogin Observer*, 1 November 1913, as quoted in *Narrogin Sketches*, Narrogin, Observer Print., 1990, p. 46

¹¹ *Narrogin Observer*, 20 June 1914, p. 3.

¹² *ibid.*

The big kitchen had a breakfast nook at one end, a pantry with a cellar beneath its floor and a servery opening into the dining room.

The 12 foot square laundry was next to the kitchen and there was a bathroom next to that. There were five large bedrooms and a sitting room which could be used for anything, but had, I believe, been planned as a reception room for callers. The hall was six feet wide and extended from the front door to the back with an archway half-way down. Holland blinds had been fitted to all 19 windows. There were 16 doors and 14 lights.¹³

The workload associated with the upkeep of these large houses fell to the women of the household.

It was hard work at first. Floors had to be scrubbed on hands and knees then polished in the same way. ... Clothes were scrubbed on a corrugated board, rinsed in three waters, wrung out by hand, then hung out to dry. After the washing was finished, I had to scrub cement troughs, walls and cement floors. The copper had to shine like a new penny. When dry, the washing was brought in and folded down ready for the next day's ironing.

Clothes were pressed with flat irons heated on a wood-burning stove. Narrogin can be very hot in summer and the ironing took six hours. It had to be finished before Father came home at half-past-five.¹⁴

The three homes on Hale Street revolved around the heads of the households who held the senior positions with the Railway Department. The Department, by its nature, was regulated by time; consequently the households echoed the authority of the clock. As Vera Harris recalls:

Everything was governed by the clock. The railway phones rang every morning at 10 o'clock throughout the railway system. This was a signal for clocks to be checked so the train schedules would not be upset.

After washing the breakfast dishes and making the beds, I would go to work in the garden where there were tree stumps, dead bushes, rocks and the heaps of rubble builders leave behind after building a house. I had always liked gardening and meant to have one here.

When I heard the 10 o'clock signal, I would go inside and continue my housework.¹⁵

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Narrogin consolidated its role as the dominant railway town in the region. During this time railway employees continued to live in *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* and the two identical homes adjacent. In the 1940s, there was discussion about the location of the station and its associated buildings and an extensive survey was undertaken of the facilities at Narrogin. In this survey the three homes on Hale Street are shown in plan but no internal detail is shown. In comparison to the other houses, at 2 and 4 Hale Street, *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* had a galvanised iron wash house, additional water tanks and a structure called a cabin added to the rear of the building.¹⁶

By the early 1950s, the replacement of steam engines with diesel locomotives had become an economic necessity. The advantages of diesels are numerous; they were cheaper to fuel with little fire hazard and their traction power was greater so that fewer engines were needed. In 1954, the first diesel engine

13 Vera Harris, *Every Life a Picture*, Colourpress, 1986, p. 20-21.

14 *ibid.*, p. 21-22.

15 *ibid.*, p. 22.

16 J. A. Lalor, Map of the Narrogin Railway complex, 1944, held by the Narrogin History House.

came through Narrogin on route from Perth to Albany.¹⁷ Although the introduction of diesel engines made rail transport more economic, it could not compete with the cost of road transport. In the 1970s, Narrogin was still a major rail centre but began to decline due to the State wide conflict of road versus rail transport and the fact that the railways had been running at a loss for many years.

The impact on *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* was that the homes on Hale Street were no longer needed for railway employees and consequently became used as general rental properties by Westrail, (previously the WAGR). Since that time minor alterations have been made to *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* however no record of these changes has been found.¹⁸ The main change has involved alteration of the rear of the building to allow for disabled access presumably for a former resident.

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) continues to be used as a rental property and is presently occupied by a family of five.¹⁹

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Railway House Narrogin (fmr), a Federation Bungalow style house, is located on the western side of Hale Street, a residential street oriented north-south and located virtually parallel to, and to the west of, the railway as it passes through the Narrogin town centre. *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* is the southernmost of three identical former railway houses located on adjacent lots in Hale Street. The houses back onto the railway reserve.

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is located approximately 7ms from the southern boundary of its lot which comprises an area of approximately 3,600sq ms. The building is set back approximately 17ms from the front (eastern) boundary and is oriented with the front door facing the street. The two other railway houses are similarly positioned.

The site of *Railway House Narrogin (fmr)* slopes downwards approximately 1.5m overall to the west. There is a right of way at the rear which provides vehicular access. The side and rear boundaries are fenced with super-six fibrous cement fencing. There is a timber framed, woven wire fence with a timber frame approximately 1.00m high to the Hale Street frontage with a steel-framed wire gate to the front path. There is a pair of steel-framed gates to the rear boundary which open to a gravel driveway. A single vehicle garage is located on the northern lot boundary. The garage is timber framed and clad with corrugated galvanised iron to the walls and to the hipped roof. The driveway is circular with an area of shrubs and trees in the centre. It continues past the garage to provide access to a carport attached to the western side of the house. The carport provides access to a disabled ramp which leads to the backdoor entrance to the house. The carport and disabled ramp have a monolithic concrete floor, brick retaining walls and flat metal deck roof supported on timber posts with a square profile trellis forming a decorative frieze around the top. There are also two small outbuildings located adjacent to the rear fence. These are a corrugated iron clad woodstore with a skillion which is in a dilapidated state, and a more recent shed clad in square profile galvanised iron sheets. There is also a Hills Hoist

¹⁷ Maurie White, *Mighty Heart*, p. 69.

¹⁸ The Public Records Office holdings of Westrail and Railway Department files and plans were checked as were Public Works Department files and plans. The Shire of Narrogin held no record of any changes to the building. Westrail also held no records of later additions.

¹⁹ Site visit by Prue Griffin and Rosemary Rosario, 3 September 1999.

washing line and a tank stand and water tank in the backyard area. The grounds are generally overgrown with long grass and weeds, however they contain plant elements indicative of former landscaped gardens. There are several flowering fruit trees near the Hale Street boundary and a Date Palm on the southern side of the house. There are also number of indigenous shrubs and trees. A concrete path extends from the front gate to the house. Adjacent to the edge of the verandah two concrete plinths are located on either side of the path.

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is a substantial brick residence with a corrugated galvanised iron broken hipped roof extending over a verandah which extends across the front and returns around the building on southern and northern sides. Roof sheeting is painted green and roof details include timber gable vents to both the eastern and western elevations (front and back) and three painted brick chimneys with pebbledash corbelling and terracotta pots. Roof drainage comprises square profile galvanised iron gutters and round downpipes draining to soak wells. The verandah is supported on 100mm x 100mm chamfered cream painted timber posts with simple decorative timber elements creating arches between each post. The verandah floor is constructed of timber boards with some evidence of replacement boards and repairs. The main structure of the building is constructed of face brick with English bond brickwork to external walls under the verandah on the eastern side of the building. The remainder of the building is stretcher bond cavity construction. There is a 250mm deep rendered band at sill height (700mm above FFL) around the perimeter of the building. Door and window openings have arched heads with a soldier course of bricks in the manner typical of buildings of the period. Brickwork features soft orange to cream colours of the type typically produced from the local Narrogin clays.

The eastern (front) elevation of the building is symmetrical. The central front door is six paneled, with glass to the upper panels, in a timber frame with sidelights and fanlights. There is a security screen of recent origin on the outside of the door. There are pairs of double hung sash windows on each side of the front door. Frames and sashes are painted white. Windows to the south and east elevation are double hung sashes with brick arched heads and rednered sills. There is a six paneled glazed door with a recent security screen to the living room (room 3) and a paneled door with a fanlight from room 2 to the verandah on the northern side of the building.

The verandah on the northern and western sides of the building has been infilled with a timber-framed structure clad variously with weatherboards, vertical timber boarding and asbestos cement flat sheet. The northern elevation features a bank of small paned colonial style windows in timber frames. There are two small windows with timber frames on the northern and western elevations of the enclosed verandah and one aluminium-framed window on the west. The back door is flush panel of recent origin.

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) follows a traditional house plan with a central passage and rooms to either side. The original brick section of the house includes seven rooms and the central passage. The second room on the southern side of the house (room 3) extends into a large faceted bay featuring six double hung sash windows on the southern side of the building. A store room between rooms 3 and 6 creates an alcove off the main hall (room 7) which is currently used for the telephone. A moulded arch in the hall separates the formal front rooms of the house from the living areas at the back, in the manner typical of the era. A stove alcove in room 6 indicates that this was probably the original kitchen, although the kitchen is currently

located in room 8. There is a timber paneled door with side lights and fanlights at the western end of the entrance hall (room 7) which was probably the original back door. The back and the northern side verandahs have been enclosed to provide laundry, bathroom and additional living areas. The enclosure has been carried out in a manner that accommodates disabled access and a disabled toilet is located between the laundry (room 10) and the bathroom (room 11). Room 12 provides an additional enclosed living space.

Internal walls are generally plastered with timber picture rails painted to match the walls. There are 300mm high timber moulded skirtings to rooms 1 and 2 and the front section of the entrance hall (room 7). Skirtings are 250mm high moulded timber elsewhere. Floors are timber tongued and grooved boarding. Internal doors are four paneled timber doors with hardware that is not original but has been chosen to reflect the style of the building. The original door to room 8 has been cut to create swing doors. Plasterboard ceilings are not original and have scotia cornices throughout. There are fireplaces in rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4. In rooms 1, 2, and 4 the fireplaces are blocked and have white painted timber surrounds. There is a gas fire installed in the fireplace in room 3. Room 6 has a solid fuel stove in the original stove recess. There is a large built in linen press in the north western corner of the entrance hall. A window has been removed and replaced with a door in room 3. Internal wall linings to the laundry, toilet and bathroom are asbestos cement flat sheet. The brick wall to room 12 has been painted.

Whilst the grounds show evidence of neglect, the current tenants have commenced a program of work to clear and improve the area around the building. Generally the building is well cared for and in very good condition.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Railway House Narrogin (fmr) is a good example of the houses constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the Railways Department for their staff in regional areas. It provides a high level of accommodation compared to other railway houses, probably because of its location in a regional centre. It is one of three identical houses built adjacent to each other in Hale Street Narrogin. The other two remain extant and in good condition in private ownership, having been disposed of previously by Westrail.

No evidence has been found of other houses constructed to the same design elsewhere, although similar houses were built in other country towns. A search of the HCWA database reveals that there are no other groups of three railway houses recorded. The Darkan Station Master's House, built in 1912 of brick and iron, is the only comparative structure on the data base. Houses of different materials were built by the Railway Department in Carnamah in 1912, Northampton in 1912 and Dumbelyung in 1913.

Houses provided for railway employees appear to have been more substantial than staff houses built by other departments, for example teachers' houses or police houses, of the period.

13.4 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further comparative research into railway houses could be carried out.