



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

York Post Office is a fine example of a civic building in Federation Arts and Crafts Style which is built in context with the adjacent buildings thereby reinforcing the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. Although entrances, fenestration and detailing differ in design in the neighbouring buildings, *York Post Office* is designed in similar scale and proportion. (Criterion 1.1)

York Post Office is a landmark which confidently addresses the building alignment of Avon Street and contributes to the streetscape in its location between two civic buildings built in a similar style. (Criterion 1.3)

Together with the two-storey Court House and the single-storey Police Station, *York Post Office* forms an impressive sculptured mass and a civic precinct that contributes to the townscape of York. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

York Post Office was built in response to the town's growing importance as a rural centre and as the town and railway centre closest to the goldfields in the Yilgarn during the initial period of the gold boom years. (Criterion 2.1)

The place is significant as the oldest functioning post office location in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

The place is significant for its close association with George Temple-Poole and is typical of his regional architecture for civic buildings. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

York Post Office contributes to the York community's sense of history and place as one of its earliest civic buildings, one which has been used for its original purpose since 1893. The use of local materials and streetscape prominence gives the place a unique regional flavour and contributes to the town's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The attached residence is a demonstration of the status and particular way of life for postmasters and their families that is in danger of being lost in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

York Post Office is a well preserved example that is representative of the civic buildings built by State Government in the gold boom years, in response to rapid growth in population and the consequent need for communications. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

York Post Office is in sound condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

York Post Office continues to be used for its original purpose; however, recent modernising of the counter and public space with Australia Post corporate colours and fittings, has diminished the cultural heritage significance of the place.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

York Post Office has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

There has been a post office on this site since 1866 making it the longest continuous use for post office facilities in Western Australia. *York Post Office* is a two-storey building built in 1893 by George-Temple Poole.

Good land was discovered in the Avon Valley in 1830, by a party led by Ensign Dale of the 63rd Regiment and the country in the vicinity of Mount Bakewell was named Yorkshire for its resemblance to that county in England. As the district was opened up for settlement, a townsite of 3840 acres was reserved at the foot of Mount Bakewell and gazetted in November, 1830. Settlers moved into the district in 1831, and the first town allotments were sold in 1835. York was one of the earliest rural settlements and the first inland town of the Swan River Colony.¹

In 1839, the *Perth Gazette* of 7 December reported that the road afforded reasonably comfortable travelling conditions and that the journey could be undertaken in a day. Mail was carried twice weekly between Perth and York. The mail coach provided welcomed communication between settlers.²

Although the town was without a formal post office, in 1840, Mr T. B. Wall, a carpenter, was appointed postmaster. His duty was to receive and dispatch mail for the residents of the York district.³

He was replaced, in 1850, by Mr G. Teede who was in charge of the school.⁴ In 1851, Aboriginal mail carriers transported mail between Toodyay and York. These arrangements continued until 1866, when, in response to the growing population, the original post office was built on this site in Avon Terrace. In 1867, a contract for mail carriage between Guildford and York and Toodyay via Northam was advertised and Mr N. Houps was successful in obtaining the contract. On 17 January 1872, the *York Post Office* became an official Post and Telegraph Office.⁵

Alexander Forrest made York his headquarters on his expeditions to Hampton Plains. In 1871, he reported that the "land between York and the Hampton Plains consisted of 300,000 acres of good pastoral land."⁶

By the 1880s, York was the fourth largest town in the state with a developing community - a school, a flour mill, a telegraph system and a representative in government. There were 132 houses and a population of 820.⁷

¹ Pitt Morrison, M., *Western Towns and Buildings*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979 p. 235.

² Schokman, H., *The History of York. Western Australia, From 1880 - 1900, With Particular Reference To The Railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976, p. 23.

³ *Northam Advertiser*, 25 November 1993, p. 23

⁴ *Northam Advertiser*, 25 November 1993, p. 23.

⁵ *Northam Advertiser*, 25 November 1993, p. 23.

⁶ Schokman, H. *The History of York, Western Australia, From 1880 -1900, with particular reference to the railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976 p. 84

The arrival of George Temple-Poole in Perth to take up his position as Superintendent of Works in 1886, coincided with the Government's plan to provide gazetted towns with post office buildings. One hundred new post office buildings and more than 20 portables were provided between 1885 and 1896. Temple-Poole introduced to Western Australia, a new style of public architecture adapting English and European models to local conditions.⁸

Gold was discovered in 1887, in the Yilgarn. York, as the most easterly town to the goldfields, grew as a commercial centre and also as the terminus for the mail services between the men on the goldfields and the rest of the world. At first, mail was taken to the fields whenever there was available means. A regular service was announced in 1888, and arrangements made for the mail to be forwarded once a month in a light trap.⁹ Business boomed in York and the mail for Europe and the rest of Australia still passed through York to Albany the chief port via the Great Southern Railway. At this time, a York merchant, Mr Horton, ran a coach together with the Government mail van between Chidlow's Well and York.¹⁰

In 1890, came the granting of responsible government. One of the aims of the public works policy was to bring all country districts into communication. The administration of government and business transactions - especially gold mining - as well as private correspondence relied on the postal service to transport the paperwork. For this reason, post offices were to become the civic centres of gold boom towns.¹¹

In York, however, progress on public buildings such as a new post office and a court house, was slow. The *Eastern Districts Chronicle* 11 March 1893, complained that the Government was neglecting York's needs.¹² However in 1892, the annual report for the Public Works Department states that £1000 was voted for the purpose of building a post office, and the contract was let on 1 May 1893 for £1890.¹³ Lord Forrest laid the foundation stone and this fact is commemorated on a plaque on the site. The new post office was opened in 1895, and later included the manually operated telephone exchange

⁷ Schokman, H. *The History of York ,Western Australia, From 1880 -1900, with particular reference to the railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976, p.2 7

⁸ Van Bremen, I. H. *The New Architecture of the Gold Boom in Western Australian Government Buildings Under the Direction of G. T. Poole, 1885-1897*. PhD thesis University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1990, p. 38.

⁹ Schokman, H. *The History of York ,Western Australia, From 1880 -1900, with particular reference to the railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976, p. 38

¹⁰ Schokman, H. *The History of York ,Western Australia, From 1880 -1900, with particular reference to the railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976, p. 38

¹¹ Van Bremen, I. H. *The New Architecture of the Gold Boom in Western Australian Government Buildings Under the Direction of G. T. Poole, 1885 -1897* PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1990, p. 335.

¹² Schokman, H. *The History of York ,Western Australia, From 1880 -1900, with particular reference to the railway*, Claremont Teachers College, Claremont, 1976, p. 93.

¹³ *Northam Advertiser* 25 November 1993, p. 23.

which became operative in January 1906, and served 21 subscribers.¹⁴ The manually operated telephone exchange remained on site until 1981.

York Post Office continues to function as a post office and residence.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

York Post Office is an unpretentious, two-storey building in the Federation Arts and Crafts style.¹⁵ The style was common for post office buildings throughout Western Australia built prior to the turn-of-the-century, particularly those designed by George Temple-Poole, Government Architect 1885-1896.

The building is built at the building line on Avon Terrace and is adjacent to the two-storey Court House (1895)¹⁶ to the south, which is next to the single-storey Police Station (1895)¹⁷ also designed by Temple-Poole.

York Post Office maintains the contextual manner of the adjacent buildings, reinforced in its street alignment, horizontal bands and treatment of the street facade. The three adjacent public buildings are clearly identified with well defined entrances, treatment of street facades and roof shapes and each of the three buildings are separated by recesses and alleys. Although they are of similar scale and constructed of the same materials, each building has a distinctive facade. Together they form a civic precinct, which contributes strongly to the impressive character of the York townscape.

York Post Office is built of rough cut stone and brickwork. The rough hewn faced, local stone is predominantly light in colour and is combined with a darker, and smoother, texture of brickwork used for quoins, opening surrounds and at wall junctions.

Temple-Poole's design for *York Post Office* is a variation on his design for the Geraldton Post Office (1892)¹⁸. The roof is single hipped with gable ventilators crowned at the ridge with a large ventilator fleche which forms the central focal point.¹⁹

York Post Office has a conspicuous hipped roof, clad with corrugated iron, prominent boxed eaves with exposed rafters, and features tall chimneys and a decorative dormer clock as the focal point of the building's symmetry.

The public entrance is through a wide, low arch (a distinctive element in Temple-Poole's public architecture) which frames an enclosed recess with five windows. The arch is flanked by windows - repeated on the upper level, with brick lintels, stone sills, and on the lower level, protected by hoods.

¹⁴ *Northam Advertiser* 25 November 1993, p. 23.

¹⁵ 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. 140-143.

¹⁶ Oldham, R., and Oldham, J., *George Temple-Poole, Architect of the Golden Years 1885-1897* (University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1980) p. 46.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*, Oldham, p. 46.

¹⁹ Oldham, R., and Oldham, J., *George Temple-Poole, Architect of the Golden Years 1885-1897* (University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1980) p. 46.

Surmounting the arched entrance is a large expanse of glazing divided into three bays. Brick quoins decorate the windows and a wide string course separates the two stories.

Like the post office designs for Geraldton and Fremantle (1907), York Post Office has a public office centrally located behind the porch with a street balcony directly above as part of the postmaster's quarters.

The ground floor of *York Post Office* comprises postal facilities and living accommodation. The postal facilities include a public hall with public and office space separated by a central counter. A mail room, mail sorting room, instrument room, and strong room, are located on the southern side of the entrance. The living quarters are accessed from the street via a courtyard and porch leading into a staircase hall and sitting room. A kitchen, dining room, larder, store room and battery room are behind. The postal facilities and residence are separated internally by a lobby. The lobby allowed the post master access from the office into the sitting room. Porches lead from the stair hall of the residence, and the postal office allowing rear access.

On the upper level, four bedrooms are arranged around a balcony, which forms the roof of the recessed porch below. Each bedroom has access onto the balcony. Two further bedrooms and a bathroom are behind.²⁰ Outbuildings include a laundry, small stables, lineman's garage and shed.

A program of regular maintenance on the place has been undertaken by Australia Post.

A lavatory block to the rear of the postal facilities was added.²¹

Circa 1960s, an exchange room was added to the rear of the mail room and the adjacent verandah was enclosed with a lean-to roof to store parcels.²²

In 1963, new fencing, unsealed paving and drainage work was carried out.²³

In 1985, the roof sheeting was replaced and in 1985/86, the Postmaster's residence were vacated while the residence was under renovation. The kitchen and toilets, on the upper and lower levels, were upgraded.²⁴

In 1991, public letter boxes were installed to the mail room.²⁵ In 1993, the lathe and plaster ceilings in the upper level bedrooms were replaced with gyprock with standard cornices.²⁶

Recent cosmetic changes to the building, including modernising the counter and public space with Australia Post corporate colours and fittings, have not altered the original fabric of the interior.

²⁰ See file P2855, Heritage Council of Western Australia for PWD Drawing No. 2 of 2052.

²¹ Date of the addition is unknown but it is suggested to have been carried out prior to 1960 as the addition appears on a drawing dated 12 February, 1960. See file P2855, Heritage Council of Western Australia for Drawing No. 11854.

²² Australia Post building file.

²³ Australian Archives York Post Office file.

²⁴ Australia Post building file.

²⁵ Australia Post building file. See Drawing No. W2-0971, Heritage Council file P2855.

²⁶ Australia Post building file.

The post office continues to operate as a post office and residence.

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition, June 1984.

Pope, B., Bush, F., Broomfield, W., and Kelsall, D, 'Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia, owned by Australia Post' (for the National Trust of Australia (WA) 1993).