



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. The assessments have been written by John Pidgeon author of 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

The dominant feature is the abundance of local stone used in the walls of the nineteenth century buildings and in the retaining walls which define the three main terraced levels of the landform. The stone, in combination with the mortar jointing creates a unity of scale and texture to the buildings. The majority of these buildings are of fair faced stone wall surfaces and display rich and varied colours of the natural stone, ranging through reds and oranges to blue. These surfaces have an affinity with those of the dry stone retaining walls built of the same stone, though undressed and without mortar. (Criteria 1.2, 1.4)

Another unifying characteristic is the quoins in the late nineteenth century buildings and the somewhat similar effect of the cement rendered door and window trims of the 1887 Court House. The light grey colour tinged red-brown with the Pilbara dust originally presented a subtle contrast, with the stronger colours of the stonework within the Police Lockup. The later painting in white of most of the quoins of the two 1896 Cell Blocks, the Police Station and the window and door surrounds of the Court House has produced a stark contrast with the stonework; nevertheless, there is a strong community perception of the distinctive quality of the buildings despite the modification in the colour of the trim. A further factor contributing to the unity and harmonious appearance of the Precinct is the universal (including the twentieth century buildings) use of unpainted or white painted corrugated sheet roofs. The exception, in regard to colour, being the rather obtrusive creamy yellow colorbond roof of the Court House and adjacent toilet roof. This is particularly noticeable when viewed from the Mt. Welcome lookout. (Criteria 1.2, 1.4)

Each nineteenth century building has its own aesthetic appeal (Criterion 1.2):

- The Court House has the slender cast iron-colonnaded verandas, the lightness of which offsets the solidity of the stone core of the building; the rendered strips adorning the western gable and the gracious interior of the court room are reminiscent of a church nave.
- The ruin of the 1887 Cell Block, the Kitchen/Day Room and the 1887 Quarters contribute to the aesthetics because of the old stone white washed walls.
- The 1896 cell blocks and the Police Lock up have their sculptural qualities with the projecting entrances of the two smaller blocks and the wings of the larger block expressed as separate arms radiating from an octagonal yard. The construction of the roofed shower cubicle enclosure in the octagonal exercise yard, the covering of the yard with a steel girder framed grille and to a lesser extent the provision of lavatories throughout the two buildings, while necessary for the functioning of the Gaol between 1976 and 1984, tend to detract from the aesthetic appeal of the interior aspects of the two buildings.
- The Police Station has light cast iron-colonnaded verandas surrounding the solid stone core reflecting the design intention of the earlier Court House.
- The 1965 reconstruction of the former kitchen wing as a toilet wing and the 1981 addition of the rather dominant Garage and Charge Room Block, both in cement blockwork, tend to reduce the aesthetic appeal of the complex.
- The Warder's Quarters and the Gaoler's Quarters have cast iron-colonnaded verandas surrounding central stone cores, though the aesthetic quality of the buildings is somewhat diminished by the unsightly asbestos clad infilling of parts of the verandas. The derelict appearance of the Gaoler's Quarters also detracts from its aesthetic appeal.
- The twentieth century buildings, while not being in complete harmony with those of the nineteenth century and not possessing any notable architectural qualities, are nevertheless relatively unobtrusive; although the Garage and Charge Room additions to the Police Station comes closest to offending in this regard because of the scale of the garage in relation to the neighbouring structures.
- The *Delonix regia* and *Albizzia lebbek* trees around the Police buildings and the *Albizzia lebbek* trees around the Warder's and Gaoler's quarters provide shade and a seasonal floral display. They are relatively mature specimens and contribute to the landscape character of the precinct in an aesthetic and environmental way.
- The link wire mesh security fences may be regarded by some as an obtrusive element, however the fences surrounding the two Cell Blocks have some historic validity in that they were necessary to the reopening of the Gaol in 1976. The link wire mesh security fences in the vicinity of the Police Lockups perform a current function and are preferable to more solid barriers which might be their alternative.

The Precinct has a landmark quality when viewed from the southern approach to the town. This quality will be enhanced with the planned rerouting of the North West Coastal Highway which will channel road traffic past this approach. (Criterion 1.3)

The nineteenth century buildings of the Precinct have an affinity to those of the town, having roofing materials, stone walling, concrete quoins and cast iron columns as common elements. The scale and density of the building stock within the Precinct is also similar to that of the town. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The modifications to the landform of the Precinct, including the buildings constructed within it, are associated with European settlement of the North West. (Criterion 2.1)

The Precinct reveals evidence of changing cultural influences affecting design and construction of the buildings, and the treatment of the landscape. (Criterion 2.1)

The Precinct is significant for being the regional prison for the whole of the North West region. (Criterion 2.2)

The *Delonix regia* and the *Albizzia lebbek* trees around the Police buildings and the *Albizzia lebbek* trees around the Warder's and Gaoler's Quarters are associated with the period following the 1924 closure of the Gaol and are an expression of the improved environmental amenity of these more permanently occupied parts of the Precinct. They also represent an influence of introduced flora associated with tropical climates. These species have, subsequently, been planted throughout the North West region, particularly in mining towns. (Criterion 2.1)

The evolution of the buildings from small timber framed structures to more impressive stone buildings demonstrates the growing affluence of the Treasury following the discovery of gold. (Criterion 2.1)

The Precinct also bears witness to changing policies in the administration of the law. This aspect is demonstrated in a number of ways. The Gaol buildings as first constructed demonstrate the harsh treatment of prisoners compared with the improved facilities installed in the Gaol for its re-opening in 1976. A study of the pre -1886 buildings compared to those constructed in 1896-1897 demonstrates the evolution of the division of the responsibilities for the custody of prisoners between the Police Department and the Department of Corrections. (Criterion 2.2)

The death of John Patt in the Juvenile Lockup, in 1983, was instrumental in establishing the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. (Criterion 2.2)

The vaulted roofed workshop constructed alongside the 1887 Kitchen/Day Room Block, in 1955, demonstrates the activities within the Precinct between the time of the closure of the Gaol, in 1924, and its re-opening, in 1976. This was the time of the motor repair business conducted from the workshop and 1887 Cell Block, with the proprietors living in the Warder's Quarters; the use of the 1896 Cell Blocks by the Shell and Vacuum oil companies; the use of the Cell Blocks as the town freezer and depot for the Country Water Supply

branch of the Public Works Department; and, the construction of the Power House on the south eastern portion of the Precinct. (Criterion 2.2)

The Precinct is associated with a number of prominent people including: early Government Residents: Robert Sholl and Lt. Col. E. Angelo; the first Chairman of the North Districts Road Board: Frederick Pearse; Architects: R. R. Jewell and G. T. Poole; Builders: S. M. Stansmore and the Bunning Brothers; and, pioneers: John and Emma Withnell and W. S. Hall. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The precinct has the potential to contribute to a wider knowledge of the cultural history of Western Australia through the activities of the Roebourne District Tourist Association (Inc) and the Museum Group who curate displays in the 1896 Cell Blocks. (Criterion 3.1)

There is potential for increasing the knowledge of the history of the Precinct with archaeological surveys over the area of the former Residency garden. (Criterion 3.2)

The nineteenth century buildings show adaptations to the harsh climate in the use of wide verandas, and cross ventilation in some of the plans, as proof against the heat, and the use of shutters on the windows and storm battens on the roof as proof against cyclones. (Criterion 3.3)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The Precinct has a close association with the Roebourne Districts Tourist Association (Inc) and the Roebourne Museum Group. These groups hold the nineteenth century buildings in high esteem for cultural and educational reasons and utilise the 1896 Cell Blocks to house displays of local history and for the dissemination travel information. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

The Precinct is a rare example of a complex embracing the functions of Police Station, Court House and Gaol contained upon the one site. Similar examples exist in the York and Busselton complexes, though in these cases the buildings are more compact and are constructed of light coloured stone, giving a different visual impact to that of the Roebourne Precinct. Also, unlike the Roebourne complex, none of the buildings in these examples are used for their original purpose. In other centres the Court Houses and Gaols are on separate sites. (Criterion 5.1)

Built in 1886-87, the Court House is the oldest functioning court house in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

The 1896 Cell blocks show technical excellence and were of a design apart from the normal trend at the time of their construction. (Criterion 5.1)

The concept of the three different functions of the law being located on different terraced levels of the site separated by dry stone wall revetments, while not necessarily planned in this way, is unique in the Western Australian context. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

12.3 CONDITION

Overall, the condition of the precinct is sound. For a full discussion of the condition of the individual components see Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

12.4 INTEGRITY

Overall, the integrity of the precinct is high. For a full discussion of the integrity of the individual components see Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Overall, the authenticity of the precinct is high. For a full discussion of the authenticity of the individual components see Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

For a detailed discussion of the documentary evidence, refer to the Conservation Plan by Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

For a detailed discussion of the physical evidence, refer to the Conservation Plan by Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).

13.3 REFERENCES

Pidgeon, J, 'Conservation Plan for the Police Courthouse and Gaol Precinct, Roebourne, Western Australia' (Members of the Cultural Environment Committee of The National Trust of Australia for the Building Management Authority, (W. A.), 1994).