

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

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)

- 3.16.1 Dealing with hazards and disasters
- 4.2 Supplying urban services
- 8.5.3 Associating for mutual aid

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 108 Government policies
- 111 Depression & boom
- 404 Community services & utilities

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Merredin Fire Station (1935) features examples of the design detail of the Interwar Stripped Classical style of architecture, consistent with other fire stations built throughout the state in the late 1930s. (Criterion 1.2)

Merredin Fire Station (1935) contributes to the heritage ambience of the streetscape of one of the main streets of Merredin. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Merredin Fire Station (1935) was built as Western Australia recovered from the Great Depression. It was among the first fire stations built in a period of intense building of fire stations, with 18 built between 1934 and 1938. (Criterion 2.1)

Merredin Fire Station (1935) was designed by architect K.C. Duncan, designer of the majority of fire stations built in Western Australia from 1930 to 1960, and who was an office bearer and life member of the Volunteer Fire Brigades' Association. (Criterion 2.3)

Merredin Fire Station (1935) is significant as the first of four standard plan single bay fire stations with accommodation and office wings designed by K.C. Duncan, and built in the 1930s. (Criterion 2.4)

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Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Merredin Fire Station Complex is highly valued by present and past members of the Merredin Volunteer Fire Brigade and their families, by the community of Merredin and district, and by the wider community of the Shire of Merredin for social and cultural reasons, including its long and valuable service. Its value is evidenced also by its inclusion in the Municipal Heritage Inventory. (Criterion 4.1)

Merredin Fire Station Complex contributes to the community's sense of place through its operation as a fire station since 1920 and through the presence of Merredin Fire Station (1935) as a distinctive building in a main street in Merredin. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

Merredin Fire Station Complex is a rare example of a fire station complex, comprising the original 1920 timber and iron station and a later substantial brick and iron fire station built in 1935, extant on the same site. (Criterion 5.1)

Merredin Fire Station (1935) is a rare remaining, original example of its type and period, comprising a single appliance room flanked by an office wing and an accommodation wing. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Merredin Fire Station Complex is representative of a substantial fire station facility established in 1920 that has functioned continuously.

12.3 CONDITION

Merredin Fire Station Complex is in good condition having been in constant use since its construction.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Overall, *Merredin Fire Station Complex* has retained a high degree of integrity. A fire station has operated continuously on the site since 1920 and both buildings evidence the original form and function of a fire station. Merredin Fire Station (1935) has high integrity as it has operated continuously as a fire station since it was built. Old Fire Station (1920) has moderate integrity. Although it has been relocated on site and is no longer in use for its original purpose, it forms an integral part of the function of a fire station and illustrates the social and community aspect of the volunteer fire brigades.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Overall, *Merredin Fire Station Complex* has a high degree of authenticity. Merredin Fire Station (1935) retains a high proportion of the original 1935 fabric with intervention only evident in the roller doors on the appliance room, and the bathroom fit out in the office facility. It continues to function as a fire station. Old Fire Station (1920) has low authenticity as it has been relocated on the site and reclad, and has a replacement floor of concrete and timber, and aluminium framed windows.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

This documentation is based on the heritage assessment completed by Irene Sauman, Historian and Laura Gray, Heritage and Conservation Consultant, in December 2005, with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Merredin Fire Station Complex comprises Merredin Fire Station (1935), a single-storey brick, render and clay tiled building in the Interwar Stripped Classical style, and Old Fire Station (1920), a timber and iron vernacular utilitarian building.

Situated about halfway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, the townsite of Merredin was established on the Eastern Goldfield railway line. The railway had reached the Merredin District by 1893, and the original Merredin Peak campsite (gazetted 1891) was resettled adjacent to the railway. It became an important railway centre and a junction for lines branching out into the newly developing Wheatbelt.¹

Early fire brigades were volunteer operations working from municipal buildings or sites provided in return for their voluntary efforts. From 1895, the Government provided some financial assistance for the purchase of fire engines in metropolitan areas and large country centres. In 1898, the Western Australian Fire Brigades' Association was formed and the Fire Brigades Act was passed, which established the Western Australian Fire Brigades Board (WAFBB). By 1904, there were 23 brigades affiliated with the Association but few registered with the WAFBB. In December 1909, the District Fire Brigades Act was passed, making it compulsory for fire brigades to register with the WAFBB and for all local authorities to accept the provisions of the Act and to contribute to the costs of the Board. By this Act, the WAFBB was empowered to procure property for fire brigade purposes.²

In the period, 1910-17, 42 new fire stations were opened. There were no standard plans at this time and various architects were engaged, some, such as J.L. Ochiltree, designing a number of stations.³

In September 1912, the Merredin Roads Board had the town declared a Fire District under the Act and three months later, on 14 December 1912, approval was received for the formation of a volunteer fire brigade and for the provision of a fire station. At a public meeting held on 9 February 1913, the Merredin Volunteer Fire Brigade was constituted.⁴

¹ A more detailed history of the early development of Merredin can be found in Heritage Council assessment documentation for Merredin Post Office (04035).

Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory, prepared by the Department of Contract and Management Services for the Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia, August 1997; Wood, Kenneth A. Ready, Aye Ready: A History of the Volunteer Fire Brigade Movement in Western Australia, The Western Australian Volunteer Fire Brigades' Association, (Inc) and the League of Champion Firemen, Perth, 1989, p. 36-37.

³ Fire and Rescue Heritage Database, cited in *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit, p. 25.

⁴ Law, F. A., *The History of the Merredin District*, Merredin Road Board, 1961, p. 83, citing Road Board minutes. The *Fire and Rescue Service Heritage Inventory* gives the formation date as October 1912 in its entry for Merredin Fire Station (former), p. 2.

The Brigade comprised fourteen men, including the captain Oliver Rees, foreman F.J. Boylan and Secretary Ben Mean, and another twelve townsmen were on the reserve. The Roads Board provided the Brigade with a shed as a 'temporary' reel house and allowed the use of the Roads Board hall at a concession for social events.⁵

By 1920, the Brigade had outgrown its temporary accommodation and requested part of the Roads Board Hall block as the site for a fire station. The Roads Board refused but offered instead a choice of Lots 115-118 on Bates Street. The Brigade selected Lot 115 and this was gazetted on 30 April 1920 as Reserve 17451 for the purpose of a fire brigade station. The WAFBB called tenders in June 1920 for construction of a timber and iron station building and a contract was awarded to J.W. Benson at a cost of £365. The Old Fire Station was opened on 22 September 1920.⁶

In 1926, the Brigade applied to the Roads Board for a motor fire engine. Up to that time, the reel had been transported to fires by manpower, but as the town grew it became more difficult to reach a fire in time to provide effective assistance. The Board refused the initial application but within a few years the Brigade had its motor fire engine. In 1929, a practice track and turf running track were established for training and demonstrations.⁷

No new fire stations were built in Western Australia between 1929 and 1933, but as the State recovered from the Depression, the WAFBB entered a period of intense building activity. In 1933, the WAFBB resolved to submit a copy of the plans of the Narrogin fire station to architect K.C. Duncan with the request he provide estimates for a similar building at Merredin.⁸ Keith Duncan had been commissioned by the WAFBB in 1926 to design most of their fire station buildings.⁹ Duncan was also a volunteer fireman and held various positions in the Volunteer Fire Brigades' Association, serving on the Executive Committee (1924-42), and as Secretary of the Association (1937-41). He was made a life member in 1937.¹⁰

The Narrogin Fire Station was designed by local architect George Lavater and opened in July 1926. It had an office and facilities to sleep four men but no attached residence. Duncan may have adapted the plan for Merredin Fire Station (1935), adding the residence and altering the facade.¹¹

A site for Merredin Fire Station was then under consideration and, as was often the case, it involved various opinions and interests. The Public Works Department (PWD) offered to provide a site in exchange for the existing fire

⁵ Law, F. A., op cit, pp. 83-84.

⁶ Certificate of Title, Vol. 964 Fol. 154, 23 June 1927; DLI Reserves Index, Reserve 17451; Law, F. A., op cit, pp. 84; *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit, entry for Merredin Fire Station (former), p. 2;

⁷ Law, F. A., op cit, pp. 85.

⁸ *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit., p. 74.

⁹ *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit., pp. 25, 37-

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¹⁰ Wood, Kenneth A. *Ready, Aye, Ready* op cit., pp. 109-112.

¹¹ Photograph of Narrogin Station, West Australian Fire Brigade Board, *Annual Report*, 1926, fp. 14; *Narrogin Observer*, 10 July, 1926, p. 5. No plans are held for Merredin fire station by Fire & Emergency Services Authority (FESA) or Department of Housing & Works (DHW).

station site (Lot 115), which was wanted for courthouse purposes. The WAFBB agreed to the exchange, provided the cost of removing Old Fire Station (1920) was borne by the Government. Lot 115 was too narrow for the proposed station building, having only a 12m frontage. In 1934, an agreement was reached for the exchange of another WAFBB site for Lot 168, which adjoined Lot 115 on the northern side. The two lots together (115 & 168) gave *Merredin Fire Station Complex* site a 20m frontage, although Lot 168 was not added to Reserve 17451.¹²

The Old Fire Station (1920) was moved to the rear of the site and Merredin Fire Station (1935) was built in front of it. The contractors for the new station were Mortimore & Thompson of Claremont, who tendered a price of £2,277. Of this figure, £852 was provided by the Merredin Roads Board and the balance by the government and the insurance companies.¹³

Merredin Fire Station (1935) was officially opened on 19 June 1935 by the chairman of the Merredin Roads Board, H.H. Harling, in the presence of some 200 ratepayers and official guests, who included W.H. Kitson, MLC; I.G. Boyle, MLA; J.R. Campbell, president of the WAFBB; H.G. Critchley, representing Volunteer Fire Brigades; D.A. Watson, insurance company representative on the WAFBB; and F.W. Gerhard, WAFBB Chief Officer. The firemen of the Merredin Volunteer Fire Brigade stood at attention in front of the Merredin Fire Station (1935) and were reported as 'presenting a smart appearance in their new uniforms'. The brigade had 19 firemen, some of whom held long-service medals for 10 and 15 years.¹⁴

The building was described briefly:

The station is one of the finest in the State, with ample accommodation for the reels and ladders. On one side accommodation is provided for a married couple as caretakers and on the other provision is made for two firemen, with a large meeting room abutting on to the footpath. The old station has been removed to the rear of the block and re-floored, and will make an excellent exercise room. A look-out and bell tower 100 feet high has also been erected at the rear of the station.¹⁵

In his speech, W.H. Kitson noted there were 29 volunteer fire brigades in the State with 531 firemen on the active list, and another 14 permanent brigades with 125 firemen. He congratulated the Merredin brigade on their efficiency when on duty and the good showing they always made at the annual demonstration. H.H. Harling then declared Merredin Fire Station open, unveiling a plaque reading:

This building was erected by the W.A. Fire Brigades Board and opened by H.H. Harling Esq. JP, Chairman of the Merredin Road Board 19 June 1935. Members of the Fire Brigades Board J.D. Campbell (president), D.A. Watson, D. Sheed, J.N. Prunster, C.H. Curlewis, F.E. Gibson, A.J. Revell, H.G. Critchley, J.L. Hardwick, F.W. Gerhard, Chief Officer. K.C. Duncan FRIA Architect Perth. Mortimore & Thompson Contractor.¹⁶

¹² Certificate of Title, Vol. 1039 Fol. 385, 22 November 1934; Law, F. A., op cit, pp. 85.

¹³ *The Merredin Mercury*, 27 June 1935, p. 3.

¹⁴ *The Merredin Mercury*, 27 June 1935, p. 3.

¹⁵ The Merredin Mercury, 27 June 1935, p. 3.

¹⁶ *The Merredin Mercury*, 27 June 1935, p. 3; physical evidence.

Mrs Harling, wife of the Roads Board chairman, had the honour of opening the door of Merredin Fire Station (1935) with a gold key, presented to her by K.C. Duncan. After the opening ceremony, afternoon tea was served in Old Fire Station (1920) and in the evening a dance social was held in the Town Hall, where the foreman of the Merredin Fire Brigade, Ernie Riordan, acted as master of ceremonies.¹⁷

Merredin Fire Brigade continued to provide a fire fighting service to the town from its new premises at Merredin Fire Station (1935) and to represent the town and district at competitions and demonstrations in Western Australia and interstate. In 1957, the Brigade won the B Grade State Championship. Old Fire Station (1920) was used as a recreation and social venue by the Brigade.¹⁸ A small lean-to bar was added at the front, and a patio and barbeque installed with a large concreted area for outdoor gatherings.¹⁹ The development and use made of Old Fire Station (1920) illustrates the social and community aspect of the volunteer fire brigades. Fundraising for the community is another aspect of the movement's work. Women have been active within the volunteer fire brigades also, first as part of the social and support network, and since 1987 as trained fire fighters, although women have always helped to fight fires when need arose.²⁰

In 1999, Merredin Fire Station (1935) was entered on the Shire of Merredin Municipal Heritage Inventory with a recommended high level (level 2) protection.²¹ The place is also entered on the Art Deco Significant Building Survey and the State Government *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*.²² Reserve 17451 was cancelled in 2004.

In 2006, Merredin Fire Station (1935) continues to be utilised in its original purpose, with the residential area occupied by a caretaker. Old Fire Station (1920) continues to be utilised as a recreation and social venue and the lookout tower retains in its original function.

In 2009, the *Merredin Fire Station Complex* is vacant, as the current Fire Station is now located in Mitchell Street, Merredin.²³

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Merredin Fire Station Complex comprises the single-storey brick, render and clay tiled Merredin Fire Station (1935) in the Interwar Stripped Classical style, and the Old Fire Station (1920), a utilitarian vernacular structure in timber and iron.

Merredin Fire Station Complex is located on the west side of Bates Street, the secondary commercial street of the town of Merredin, and is located on the south side of the former Commonwealth Bank. The street is wide with a central median strip and angled parking in the vicinity of the building.

¹⁷ *The Merredin Mercury*, 27 June 1935, p. 3.

Law, F. A., op cit, pp.

¹⁹ Physical evidence.

²⁰ Wood, Kenneth A., op cit., pp. 94-107.

²¹ Whelans Consultants, *Shire of Merredin Municipal Heritage Inventory*, 1999, Place 78/20.

²² Geneve, Vyonne, *Significant Buildings of the 1930s in Western Australia*, National Trust, Perth, 1994; *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit. Old Fire Station (1920) is incorrectly recorded in this Inventory as having been demolished.

²³ Correspondence received from Shire of Merredin, 7 December 2009.

Merredin Fire Station (1935) has a frontage that has a symmetrical form, with a prominent central stepped parapet flanked by an office wing on the north side and a residential wing on the south side, with a low face brick wall and pedestrian gate on the boundary. Within the residential setback there are three mature frangipani plantings. Merredin Fire Station occupies most of the width of the site, with approximately 1m setbacks each side. The site is rectangular, and the rear boundary adjoins a right of way that affords vehicular access to the rear. Behind Merredin Fire Station is a steel tower, a rose garden on the north side, and the relocated Old Fire Station (1920) also on the north, with recent toilets behind it on the ROW boundary. On the south side are a steel framed carport, rescue trailer shed, and patio. The site is level and is detailed in various surfaces: grassed area from the rear of the building to an expansive concrete area extending under and beyond the patio, to the rear entry gate, and on the south residential side, there is a recent native garden extending to the carport and shed, beyond which is a gravel driveway. The side and part of the rear boundaries, and the definition between the residential rear yard and the fire station area, are delineated by 1.8m high fibre cement fencing. There are vehicular gates on the ROW entry.

The carport, shed, patio, and 1980s toilets are of no heritage significance.

Merredin Fire Station Complex shows evidence of two significant periods of development; Old Fire Station (1920) relocated to the rear of the site and Merredin Fire Station (1935), comprising appliance room, office wing and residential wing constructed at the front of the site.

The front facade of Merredin Fire Station (1935) displays characteristics of the Inter-War Stripped Classical style. The use of symmetrical massing, somewhat Spartan appearance, art deco elements, and plain wall surfaces light in colour (per the central element on the façade) are demonstrated in the street frontage.

Merredin Fire Station (1935) is a single-storey face brick and render construction with a hipped clay tile roof. The street frontage features a central rendered element with a stepped parapet and a more recent 'roller door' to the appliance room. The stepped parapet features a central gable pediment, and is stepped back into the recessed opening with pilasters flanking the outer edges or the central element. Symmetrically flanking the rendered centre is the office wing on the north, and one of the two rooms of the frontage of the semidetached residential wing. The hipped roof, ogee gutters, battened lined eaves, and moulded bracketed flat roofed awnings are replicated on each of the flanking frontages. However, the office frontage has a central semi glazed door with multi-paned obscure glass fanlight and sidelights, and the residential room has a replacement aluminium framed window. The residential frontage has a setback frontage and veranda to the south. The concrete floored veranda has a high face brick dado enclosure, and the veranda roof is a skillion extension of the main hipped roof.

The exterior wall detail is face brick to head height of windows and render above that height, to the entire building. The windowsills are similarly rendered. The windows on the verandahed section of the residential frontage contain the original art deco leadlight in a geometric decorative pattern. The design is replicated in the two small highlight windows on the south wall of the residential wing. At the rear, there is a steel framed corrugated galvanised steel roofed carport immediately behind the rear roller door of the appliance room.

Merredin Fire Station (1935) is irregular in form, with the appliance room separating the elements each side: office wing and residential wing. Entry is through the office door on the north frontage. Continuing through the office into a short hall, there is a small former kitchen on the right followed by a recent bathroom fit out also on the right, and the locker room at the rear. The locker room accesses the exterior immediately behind the appliance room, and the office accesses direct into the appliance room. The appliance room steps down from the office. It has roller doors for the tender access at front and rear.

Access to the residential wing is from the Bates Street frontage, or through a rear door from the yard. The residential wing is not interconnected to the appliance room. Access to the residential wing at the time of inspection was limited to the front living room, although from there it was possible to see that there were two bedrooms on the north side, and an office, and a kitchen behind the living room.

The office and residential wings have the original jarrah tongue and groove floor boards throughout (except in the bathrooms), hard plaster walls with grooved picture rail line, battened plasterboard ceilings with battens in geometric patterning, and original skirtings and architraves. The doors are typical five-panel in the interior and ledged vertical tongue and groove externally, with original hardware throughout, except for the residence, which has a replacement front door. The fireplaces in the office (truncated) and the residence (central in living room wall) are similar in detail with face brick surrounds featuring vertical and horizontal patterned bricks, and a simple bracketed jarrah mantle. The appliance room has a concrete floor and hard plaster, gloss finish walls and decorative pressed metal ceiling.

The Old Fire Station (1920) is rectangular in form with a lean-to kitchen across the rear (west) and a small lean-to extension on the east end (bar area). The building is timber framed and has a high-pitched gable roof clad with corrugated iron. The walls are clad with vertical profile galvanised iron sheeting, and the windows have been replaced with aluminium framed sliding glass. The interior walls and ceilings are lined with battened asbestos. The kitchen ceiling is on the rake and the main ceiling is flat. The floor is concrete except for a timber centre rectangular section off the main hall. The kitchen fit out is simple 1950s, and the bar more recent.

The steel framed tower has a bell and siren. There is a timber platform approximately 5m above ground level, and a vertical ladder extends to the top of the tower.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

During 1932, K.C. Duncan was requested to draw up plans and specifications for a standard building for country fire stations. Between 1934 and 1938, 18 new stations were built, 15 of them in country areas. These buildings feature similar characteristics and external detailing reflecting the introduction of standard requirements and a single architect, although one could hardly claim they were built to a 'standard' plan.²⁴ Four of these country

²⁴ Thematic History of Fire Brigades in Western Australia, CALM, August 1996.

stations are on the State Register: P2568 *Toodyay Fire Station*, P1340 *Coolgardie Fire Station*, P8806 *Guildford Fire Station and Quarters* and P7508 *North Kalgoorlie Fire Station*.

The majority of stations built in the 1930s were designed with the accommodation/office areas at the rear, but the stations at Bassendean (1934), South Perth (1935) and Albany (1938) were built to a similar design as Merredin Fire Station (1935), with accommodation/office wings on either side of a single appliance room. Bassendean Fire Station has had one wing demolished and a two bay appliance room attached. South Perth Fire Station has been extensively altered in its conversion to a private residence. Albany Fire Station was built with a single office wing and a detached residence and has had a two bay appliance room and additional accommodation added. These stations are all of brick construction with a dominant entrance treatment to the appliance room comprising pilasters and a raised parapet.²⁵

The appliance room entry statement is a feature shared with the single appliance stations at *Guildford Fire Station and Quarters* (1934), *North Kalgoorlie Fire Station* and Tammin (1935), Southern Cross, Busselton and Meekatharra (1936), and Toodyay (1938), which have no attached accommodation.²⁶ Busselton and Meekatharra were replaced with new stations in 1990, but are extant. *Toodyay Fire Station*, in Interwar Stripped Classical has had a second appliance room added on one side. *North Kalgoorlie Fire Station* and *Guildford Fire Station & Quarters* are both in Interwar Functionalist style. *Guildford Fire Station and Quarters* has a detached residence.²⁷

Twelve fire stations were built in the 1920s. Of these, only Katanning is known to have been of timber and iron construction and cost £321 to build in 1920, so is likely to have been of similar design to the Old Fire Station (1920) at Merredin. According to the *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, Katanning station building has been demolished.²⁸ There are no surviving timber and iron stations from the 1900-1920 period. Four iron-clad stations are known to have been built in the 1930s, to a similar style as Old Fire Station (1920), with vertical or horizontal cladding and louvre and casement windows. Each had a lean-to kitchen/bedroom at the rear. Norseman has been demolished, Fimiston and Cue are no longer in use as stations, and *Coolgardie Fire Station* is still in use and on the State Register.

Merredin Fire Station (1935) is an excellent example of its type, and the only one constructed with accommodation/office wings still in original condition. Old Fire Station (1920) is only a fair remaining example of its type.

Merredin Fire Station Complex is a rare example of a fire station complex with fire station buildings from two periods of development extant.

²⁵ *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit, entry Merredin Fire Station, pp. 3, 74-76.

²⁶ *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit, entry Merredin Fire Station, p. 3.

²⁷ HCWA database and assessment documentation.

²⁸ *Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia Heritage Inventory*, op cit, entry Merredin Fire Station, p. 74

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH
