



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

## Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 0889
2. **Name.** Fowler Warehouse (Former) (1900)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry.**  
The warehouse building and the land on which it stands, being Lot Fremantle 87 & 88 comprised in C/T 1240/798.
4. **Local Government Area.** City of Fremantle
5. **Location.** 38-40 Henry Street, Fremantle
6. **Owner.** City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

### DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The Fowler Warehouse in Henry Street, Fremantle, was designed by Victorian emigrant architect F.W. Burwell, and constructed in 1900 for the D. &J. Fowler Company. The building is a two storey ornate stucco office and warehouse building, with a basement.

The Fowlers emigrated to the Western Australian colony from Scotland, and in 1854 established the D. &J. Fowler Company. It was a successful import business, representing names such as J.S. Fry and Sons, Ltd., Bristol; Crosse and Blackwell Ltd., London; J. & J. Coleman, Norwich; Gilliard and Co., London; Hudson's; North China Insurance Co. Ltd.; amongst others. The Fowler company marketed goods using the "Lion" and "Alola" brands, as well as "Amgoorie" tea; brand names that are still familiar today. D. &J. Fowler Company played an important role in the economic development of Fremantle.

In the 1890s the Western Australian goldrushes rapidly increased local prosperity, which prompted D. and J. Fowler to expand their premises. Adjacent lots in Henry and Pakenham Streets were purchased in 1897, and temporary buildings constructed. In 1899 the firm began to redeveloped the two sites. The original buildings were demolished to make way for the more substantial building which is there now.

The architect of the new Fowler Building was F.W. Burwell, who practiced in Fremantle. He designed primarily commercial buildings, being responsible for the design of the Victoria Pavilion at Fremantle Oval (1897), the Freemason's

Hotel (1903), Stewart and Lloyds Premises, Caledonian Hotel, and warehouses in Pakenham, Newman and Henderson Streets.

A description of the Fowler Building in 1901 reads: "The principal frontage is in Henry Street and presents a bold and massive appearance. The elevation shows a series of rusticated piers with richly foliated capital, resting on a basement with panelled and moulded plinth. These support the main entablature consisting of moulded architrave, frieze and cornice, the latter enriched with medallion, dentils and other decorative elements, the whole surmounted by a balustrade with piers and pedestals, bearing the name of the firm and the date of the establishment of the firm, 1854"<sup>1</sup>

The premises were managed by Mr E. Allnut "a prominent member of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce, and a gentleman held in high esteem by his colleagues in the Chamber for his strict business integrity."<sup>2</sup>

In 1915 the office functions at Fremantle were transferred to rented premises in Murray Street, Perth, but the warehouse in Fremantle was retained as the main site.<sup>3</sup> In 1922, £10,000 was spent on additions at Fremantle<sup>4</sup>, but the details of these extensions is not known. In 1941 Allen and Nicholas designed alterations to the toilets in the building.

Fowlers sold the buildings and Fremantle City Council has been the owner since August 1971. In 1978 the Fremantle Furniture Factory leased the building and have been in operation in the building since that time .

## PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The Fowler Building is sited approximately half way along the eastern side of Henry Street, a street occupied by numerous warehouses, including the Moores Buildings, and the Union Stores, further north, on the corner of High Street.

The Fowler Building consists of a basement and two storeys, built in brick with a stucco facade detailed in the Federation Academic Classical style.<sup>5</sup> The building has a rusticated base, double height pilasters with Corinthian capitals, arched windows, and a dentil cornice below the parapet. Decorative scroll work decorate the spandrels formed by the archivolt, and above the entrance and laneway arches.

The building occupies lots in both Henry and Pakenham Streets. The service entry to the premises is off a central laneway running from Henry Street to Pakenham Street.<sup>6</sup> The laneway allowed drays to be unloaded without having to

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<sup>1</sup> Thiel, P.W.H., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia* (Perth, 1901) p487

<sup>2</sup> Thiel, P.W.H., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia* (Perth, 1901) p487

<sup>3</sup> Parker, J. *History of the D.J. Fowler Building, Henry Street, Fremantle 1900* (University of Western Australia, History 104 Seminar Paper) p7.

<sup>4</sup> Parker *op.cit.* p7.

<sup>5</sup> Apperley, 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)

<sup>6</sup> Thiel, P.W.H., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia* (Perth, 1901) p487. The Pakenham Street complex served a different but complementary role, containing and foundry which attended to the shoeing of animals and wagon repairs. This area was the site of the engine house and by 1915 had the addition of a coffee-roasting plant.

be turned around. Lifting machinery was placed reaching out into the service well over the laneway, to facilitate the easy unloading of drays by workers and to service the upper floors. Oregon doors, eighteen feet high, closed the laneway when not in use. These doors are still extant.

The interior construction of the building was considered to be innovative. The building was constructed with steel girders and joists, and riveted steel columns to support the upper floors. The interior planning creates an efficient and economical use of floor space, which maximises the available natural light.<sup>7</sup>

Stone stairs lead from a small entry hall up to the offices, on the elevated ground floor. The impressive doors opening into the office space are brass handled, cedar panelled doors with glazed panels in the upper section, and glazed sidelights. A contemporary description cites the glazing as being "richly embossed glass panels"<sup>8</sup> but currently it is of plain glass.

The office space is distinguished by timber detailing and a decorative pressed metal ceiling. The manager's office is separated from the general office space by a well detailed partition wall of jarrah and glass. An ornamental timber pediment over the doorway helps to convey the status of the manager's office. This area is largely intact.<sup>9</sup>

The counting room is a spacious area, well-lit by skylights. The ceiling is of pressed metal. There is a concrete vault with slate-lined shelves and a heavy Chubb safe door to ensure the safe, and fire proof, storage of records. This area is still intact.

The rest of the building is quite plain and functional. Flooring throughout the office and warehouse is jarrah boards. Ceilings, the underside of the floor above, are left unlined, and steel support columns are left exposed, displaying only the patterns of their rivets.

In 1992, a major refurbishment program was undertaken.<sup>10</sup> Work included removal of corrosive metal struts and replastering part of the facade (\$135,000), painting (\$20,000) and the installation of an early fire warning system (\$22,000).

## **ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

### **1. AESTHETIC VALUE**

The bold facade of the (former) Fowler Warehouse, richly moulded with classical details, has considerable aesthetic significance. The building makes a strong contribution to the character of the streetscape and architectural identity of Fremantle's West End.

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<sup>7</sup> Parker, J. *History of the D.J. Fowler Building, Henry Street, Fremantle 1900* (University of Western Australia, History 104 Seminar Paper), p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Thiel, P.W.H., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia* (Perth, 1901), p.487.

<sup>9</sup> Internal details from photographs 7.10.93, HCWA

<sup>10</sup> "Cracks discovered", *Fremantle Gazette*, June 16, 1992

The building is part of a suite of buildings that demonstrate the gold boom architecture for which Fremantle is renowned. Each of these buildings contribute a streetscape element, the loss of which would be detrimental to the scale and ambience of Henry Street.

## **2. HISTORIC VALUE**

The Fowler's Warehouse building has historic significance as a demonstration of the complexity and diversity of goods and mercantile activities in Fremantle, directly related to the growth of Western Australia during the goldrush.

The scale of the building and its sophisticated decoration reflects the rapid growth of the economic base of the State. The place demonstrates the importance of the port city in the supply of provisions throughout Western Australia.

The building has a close association with D. and J. Fowler: a mercantile firm, whose importation of goods into Australia was significant at the turn of the century, and which made a significant contribution to the commercial development of Fremantle.

## **3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

The building is significant as one of the first buildings in Fremantle to incorporate boldly exposed steel girders, joists and riveted columns in its construction. The design allowed maximum entry of light into the building, as well as providing strength and minimal bulk in construction. The use of lifting machinery to service the upper floors of the building was innovative, and indicative of modern trends in warehouse management.

## **4. SOCIAL VALUE**

The Fowler Building demonstrates the pivotal role general merchants and traders played in the development of Fremantle in the late nineteenth century. The building strongly contributes to the community's image of Fremantle's West End.

## **5. RARITY**

The Fowler building is one the largest architect designed warehouses in Fremantle. Larger, later, warehouses were designed in a more functional style, and lack the stylistic detail of the Fowler Building.

## **6. REPRESENTATIVENESS**

The Fowler Building is representative of the contribution of mercantile activity in the development of Fremantle port at the turn of the century.

## **CONDITION**

The building underwent some restoration work in 1992 and is in sound condition.

## **INTEGRITY**

The building continues to be used for manufacturing, offices, and show rooms, uses not dissimilar to those for which it was designed. The integrity of the building is high.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

The fabric of the building and its interior finishes, including pressed metal ceilings, ornate cornices, timber and glass office partitions, cedar front doors and other fittings are intact. The building retains a high degree of authenticity.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Fowler Building has considerable cultural significance related to its bold architectural design and its association with mercantile activities, and D. & J. Fowler in particular, in the development of the port of Fremantle and Western Australia.

The facade of the Fowler Building, together with adjacent buildings in Henry Street, strongly contributes to the "gold boom" (turn of the century) urban character for which the West End of Fremantle is renowned.

## **8. Register of Heritage Places**

Interim Entry        20/11/1992

Permanent Entry    09/11/1993

## **9. Conservation Order**

## **10. Heritage Agreement**

## **11. References**

Thiel, P.W.H., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia* (Perth, 1901)

Parker, J. *History of the D.J. Fowler Building, Henry Street, Fremantle 1900* (University of Western Australia, History 104 Seminar Paper) p7.

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"Cracks discovered", *Fremantle Gazette* ,June 16, 1992

National Trust Assessment Exposition

Register of the National Estate Data Sheet