



# 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

The *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is significant for the aesthetic qualities displayed in the applied decorative elements. The eclectic mix of this ornamentation is characteristic of the Federation period. (Criterion 1.1)

The rhythmical expression of the lengthy, single-storey elevation makes an interesting contribution to the remote western end of Fitzgerald Street and provides an attractive termination to the vista along Millington Street. (Criterion 1.3)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is on the site of the original railway through the area, a site that, for a time, became the focus of business occupation of that sector of the town. (Criterion 2.1)

As an important station in the railway link to the goldfields, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* provides evidence of a significant period of industrial history in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is highly valued by the community, both of the township and the wider agricultural district, for its former role as a transport interchange for passengers, produce, machinery and supplies. (Criterion 4.1)

As a former focal point of the township, it contributes to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

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### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

The application of eclectic ornamentation at *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is representative of a constructional preoccupation of the gold boom period. The quality of the detailing reflects the pre-eminence of Northam as a rail centre in the Eastern District and the subsequent prosperity of the town. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is in good condition and is responding to the past and current periods of responsible management. Isolation from the town centre and only part-time occupation of the building have meant vandalism is a concern despite the tight security at the place.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The building no longer operates as a working railway station, but the use as a railway museum and home to the Vintage Car Club is compatible and the original intention is still very evident. *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* has high integrity.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

The incorporation of the original three structures on the site into one building earlier this century has not significantly impaired the form or scale of the building. Conservation treatment to ensure the longevity of the building and remaining fabric has not been at the expense of significant features. *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* has moderate authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Carolyn Denham-Shade, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* (1900) comprises three red brick buildings with corrugated iron roofs and is situated in the Avon Valley town of Northam, 100 kilometres east of Perth. The main building with a central passage includes a waiting room, offices, post office, telegraph office and cloakroom. There is a building on either side of the main construction separated from it by water tanks, a ladies' toilet block on one side, a lamp room and gentlemen's toilets on the other.

In 1830, Ensign Robert Dale of the 63rd Regiment, explored the fertile valley. Early European settlers of the Swan River Colony, eager for land, left Perth to settle in the towns of Northam, York, and Newcastle.

In 1868, there were calls for a railway to be built from Fremantle to the Avon Valley. In May 1868, a petition, signed by residents, businessmen and farmers, was presented to the Legislative Council requesting a railway line be laid to York or Northam.<sup>1</sup>

In December 1877, a large public meeting in Northam voted in favour of building a railway line to the town.<sup>2</sup>

Early in 1880, the government raised loans from overseas to build a railway system in the colony. By 1881, a railway line had been completed between Fremantle and Perth.<sup>3</sup>

The townsfolk of York and Northam both vied for the railway line to be extended from Perth to their towns. On 19 June 1884, it was reported in the *West Australian* '...wanted known that the Northam and Newcastle districts possess more stock, more population, more produce and more corn than the district of York.'<sup>4</sup> On this basis Northamites believed that a railway line should connect their town to the capital. At this time there were only 44 homes in the township.<sup>5</sup>

On 7 June 1886, a tender was called to build a railway station at Northam. On 16 July 1886, the tender was awarded to local builder, James Byfield, for £434-

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<sup>1</sup> Bourke, Michael. J. *On the Swan* (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1987) p.226.

<sup>2</sup> 'Statement Regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995) p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Appleyard, R.T. 'Economic and Demographic Growth' *A New History of Western Australia* edited by C.T. Stannage. (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1981) p.216 ; Erickson, Rica *The Victoria Plains* (Lamb Paterson, Osborne Park, WA, 1969) p.61.

<sup>4</sup> *West Australian* 19 June 1884 cited in Erickson, Rica *The Dempsters* (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1978) p.213.

<sup>5</sup> Hammond, J.E. *Western Pioneers* (Facsimile Edition, Hesperian Press, Perth, WA, 1980) p.121.

7-0.<sup>6</sup> This original station was 'built of wood, was very small, and had a room for the station master, it was more a "halt" than a station.'<sup>7</sup>

In 1886, a railway line was built from Spencers Brook to Northam. The line 'terminated on the western boundary of the Northam townsite, in what the townspeople termed the dismal swamp.'<sup>8</sup> Wednesday 13 October 1886, when the line was officially opened, was 'a red letter day for Northam.'<sup>9</sup> The first train arrived, travelling on rails of steel fixed to jarrah sleepers that were held in place with ironstone gravel.<sup>10</sup>

In 1887, gold discoveries in the Yilgarn region prompted calls for the government to provide a rail link to the goldfields. Once again 'the battle for the routes' was on between Northam and York.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1888 and 1889, further gold discoveries in Southern Cross resulted in Northam changing from 'a very quiet, but ambitious little village possessing only 2 or 3 business houses' into a thriving supply area. Thousands of men from all over the world travelled through Northam on their way to the goldfields. These prospective miners purchased food and necessary equipment in the town.<sup>12</sup>

In May 1891, a public meeting was called in Northam to discuss the possibility of a rail link to the goldfields. Concern was shown for the effect this would have on the town. The question was asked, '... [is] Northam to be a quiet, sleepy, podgy little place, or [is] it to take its place among the leading centres in the [Colony]?' Prominent Northam businessman, George Throssell, lobbied Premier John Forrest, advocating Northam's suitability as the rail centre for the goldfields.<sup>13</sup>

In December 1891, when it was announced that the Forrest government intended to build a line from Northam to the goldfields, the decision was seen as the result of much political manoeuvring on Northam's behalf. 'Northam was exultant, York was appalled.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Government Gazette* 7 June 1886; *Government Gazette* 16 July 1886 cited in National Trust Assessment Exposition, 5 May 1980; Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman, Memo Aug/Sep 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman, Memo Aug/Sep 1995.

<sup>8</sup> 'Statement regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995); Erickson, Rica *The Victoria Plains* (Lamb Paterson, Osborne Park, WA, 1969) p.61; Chambers, Trant 'The Railways of Western Australia' (Published 1895, B/L) cited in National Trust Assessment Exposition, 5 May 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Battye, J.S. *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia* (Hussey & Gillingham, Adelaide, 1912) p. 461; *West Australian* 16 Oct 1886.

<sup>10</sup> Hough, P. 'History of Northam as a Railway Centre' (1962) pp.31-32.

<sup>11</sup> *Railways Institute Magazine*, January 1983, p 6 ;Garden, D. *Northam. An Avon Valley History* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1979) p.127; 'Recollections' (1929) Battye Library PR6172.

<sup>12</sup> Appleyard, R.T. 'Economic and Demographic Growth' *A New History of Western Australia* edited by C.T Stannage (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1981) pp.218-9 ; Erickson, Rica *The Bride Ships* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1992) p.130; Hammond, J.E. *Western Pioneers* (Facsimile Edition, Hesperian Press, Perth, WA, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Throssell, G.L. 'George Throssell, an Appreciation' Battye Library PR37; Garden, D. *Northam. An Avon Valley History* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1979) p.130.

<sup>14</sup> Garden, D. *Northam. An Avon Valley History* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1979) p.131; Erickson, Rica *The Dempsters*(UWA Press, Nedlands, 1978) p.238; *Railways Institute Magazine*, January 1983, p.7.

Economy was the reason given for the decision. A railway line from Northam was shorter and would cost £500 less than one from York.<sup>15</sup>

The Northam goldfields line was officially opened in July 1894, and a timetable was published for prospective passengers.<sup>16</sup> In 1894, the foundation stone for the brick railway station, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*, was laid.<sup>17</sup>

In March 1896, The Grand Hotel, across the road from *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* '... was opened, and passengers were met by a bellringer announcing the attractions [of the hotel] ... ' Passengers on their way to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie had a thirty minute stop at Northam.<sup>18</sup>

By 1897, Northam was a thriving supply centre for 'a [goldfields] population of some sixty thousand souls, a consuming population [that] was to look to Northam primarily for its food supplies.' Major reconstruction and expansion of the railway yards took place.<sup>19</sup>

On 14 December 1899, members of the Northam Municipal Council recommended that the Commissioner of Railways be urged to start the building of the promised new railway station.<sup>20</sup> By 8 February 1900, detailed plans for *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* had been completed.<sup>21</sup> In November 1900, it was reported at a council meeting that *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* and a new school had recently been opened.<sup>22</sup>

The site of the new railway station, some distance from the main business district of the town, resulted in many businesses moving closer to capitalise on the passing trade. Houses for the railway workers were situated around *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* eventually leading to a social, economic and political division of the residents in the town of Northam. Photographs of that period show busy station yards and carriages loaded with goods.<sup>23</sup>

By 1901, the population of Northam was 2018.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, the original station was demolished.<sup>25</sup> By 1929 'capital costs over the whole period of railway building [had] slightly exceeded £5000 a mile.'<sup>26</sup>

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15 Garden, D. *Northam. An Avon Valley History* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1979) pp.131-135; *Northam/Katrine Heritage Trail* (WA Heritage Committee, 1988) p.11.

16 Erickson, Rica *The Dempsters* (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1978) p.259; Battye, J.S. *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia* (Hussey & Gillingham, Adelaide, 1912) p.462; *Railways Institute Magazine*, January 1983, p.8; Finkel, George. *Western Australia, 1829-1900* (Nelson, Melbourne, 1976) p.92.

17 'Statement Regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995) p.2.

18 'Significance of the Building' (Information sheet) p.2; Garden, D. *Northam. An Avon Valley History* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1979) p.138.

19 Throssell, G.L. 'George Throssell, an Appreciation' Battye Library PR37; Appleyard, R.T. 'Economic and Demographic Growth' *A New History of Western Australia* edited by C.T Stannage (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1981) pp.218-219; 'Statement regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995) p.2.

20 Northam Municipal Council Minute Book, 14 December 1899, General Business, p.86.

21 Northam Municipal Council Minute Book, 8 February 1900, Correspondence, p.98; WAGR, Copy of E.E.L. Plan No. 3461.

22 Northam Municipal Council Minute Book, 9 November 1900, General Business, p.178.

23 Photographs - Battye Library BA 718/29; Battye Library 2610B/39.

24 Colebatch, Hal. *The Story of a Hundred Years* (Government Print, WA, 1929) p.382.

25 National Trust Assessment Exposition, 5 May 1980.

26 Colebatch, Hal. *The Story of a Hundred Years* (Government Print, WA, 1929) p.426.

During the Second World War years of 1939-1945, 'thousands of servicemen passed through *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* on their way to and from the Northam Training Camp.'<sup>27</sup> After the war, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was the disembarkation point for hundreds of displaced persons on their way to the Northam Migrant Camp.

In September 1952, it was noted that *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* received eleven passenger trains a week.<sup>28</sup> By November 1962, 'Northam [was] a major railway centre ... with an assured future.'<sup>29</sup> In December 1955, and June 1958, alterations were made to *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*.<sup>30</sup>

On 14 February 1966, Australia's 'decimalisation day', *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was closed. The last train left at 2.30pm. Passenger operations were moved to the new railway station at the east end of town, in Peel Terrace.<sup>31</sup> After its closure in 1966, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was used on a casual basis by a variety of community groups and gradually fell into disrepair.

On 20 March 1972, the *West Australian* reported that students from Northam High School had volunteered to clean up the old station, and that the Northam Town Council hoped eventually to convert it to a railway museum.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the use of Government funds to paint *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* on several occasions, and the hopes expressed for its use as a museum, Councillor Little complained in November 1973, that no progress was being made in this regard. He noted that *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* had had a variety of uses, including Meals on Wheels, a Civil Defence store, and a hostel for travellers. He wondered was there any space left for its intended use as a railway museum. He added that 'the town was in danger of becoming a laughing stock, as the only town in the world with a railway museum without a train.'<sup>33</sup>

In October 1979, a National Trust team assessed *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*, noting that the place was of architectural significance and historical importance to the town of Northam. The place was Classified by the National Trust in May 1980.

The National Trust report stated that *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* 'was no longer used as a railway station and was soon to be restored for use as a museum and tourist overnight accommodation.'<sup>34</sup>

The 1980 *Western Australian Street Directory* drew attention to *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* as a point of interest in the town. It noted that 'the station and an old steam train are presently being restored.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Northam/Katrine Heritage Trail* (WA Heritage Committee, 1988) p.11.

<sup>28</sup> Gregson, G.H. 'Northam WA', UWA Research Report No.39, September 1952, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Hough, P. 'History of Northam as a Railway Centre' (1962) p.38.

<sup>30</sup> WAGR Plans 4357 & 4722.

<sup>31</sup> Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman.Memo Aug/Sep 1995; *Northam/Katrine Heritage Trail* (WA Heritage Committee,1988) p.11; 'Statement regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995) p.3.

<sup>32</sup> *West Australian* 20 March 1972.

<sup>33</sup> *Sunday Times* 11 November 1973.

<sup>34</sup> 'National Trust Assessment Exposition' 5 May 1980.

In 1981, a publication described *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* as 'a well preserved gold boom railway station ...'<sup>36</sup> On 15 June 1982, it was noted at a council meeting that the 'complete restoration of the old railway station is a financial impossibility.' However, by 15 September that year, the Council was considering a Railway Restoration Committee suggestion that they run the place as a railway museum.<sup>37</sup>

Between May and December 1986, Westrek workers, Community Service order workers and volunteers from the Railway Preservation Society were involved in restoration work on parts of *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*.<sup>38</sup>

On 26 January 1988, a Final Report on *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was submitted to the Heritage Committee. The report, which included photographs taken in 1985, detailed grants received, and listed restoration work carried out at *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*.<sup>39</sup> During the same month, part of the west end of *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was leased to the Youth Hostels Association by the owner, Northam Town Council.

In the Bicentennial year of 1988, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was recorded as a place worth visiting in a Heritage Trail publication. A tourist map of the time shows *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* and notes the opening times for visitors.<sup>40</sup>

In March 1993, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* was short listed for inclusion in the Town of Northam Municipal Heritage Inventory.

On 22 March 1995, the *Northam Advertiser* reported that town's residents seemed disinterested in heritage matters. An earlier observer had also noted that 'Northam has very little left that hasn't been modernised or destroyed, and the old Northam Railway Station is still basically as was in original condition.'<sup>41</sup>

In August 1995, the secretary and chairman of the Northam Railway Preservation Association, Jeff Pollard, stated that the group was 'in the process of confirming the 1894 building date' of *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*. Elsewhere it was recorded that 'The chief architect of Westrail has been extremely enthusiastic ... by searching the Battye Library for the original architect's drawings and information.'<sup>42</sup>

Currently, the *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is used as a Railway Museum. A part of the building is used as a meeting place for the Northam Vintage

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35 'National Trust Assessment Exposition' 5 May 1980; *Western Australian Street Directory* 1980, p.218.

36 Molyneux, I. *Looking Around Perth* (Wescolour Press, East Fremantle, 1981) p.115.

37 Northam Municipal Council Minute Book, 15 June 1982 (Ref: 3265) & 15 September 1982.

38 'Railway Preservation Group Report 1988' p.1.

39 'Railway Preservation Group Report 1988' pp.1-6.

40 *Northam/Katrine Heritage Trail* (WA Heritage Committee, 1988); Poster - Battye Library, PR10034/7.

41 *Northam Advertiser* 22 March 1995, p.4 ; 'Statement regarding Cultural Heritage' (Circa 1995) p.3.

42 Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman, Memo Aug/Sep 1995; 'Significance of the Building' (Information sheet) p.2

Vehicle Club. Recently, the Northam Town Council allocated funds for landscaping the area around *Northam Railway Station (fmr)*.<sup>43</sup>

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* museum is open on Sundays between 10am and 4.00pm. It is expected that, with the help of the Northam Tourist Bureau and government funding, the museum will soon be open on some weekdays and Saturday afternoons.<sup>44</sup>

### 13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is located on Fitzgerald Street West, opposite Millington Street, at the remote, western end of Northam. The building is set back from the road, behind a bituminised carpark area with low level landscaping.

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is a single-storey, brick, iron and timber building. The long rectangular shape stretches parallel to the street with a prominent central ticket hall providing public access between the carpark and platform. The building was initially three separate buildings with two ancillary structures at each end. Water tanks were located in the space between the buildings but, sometime prior to 1955, the ancillary structures were incorporated into the main building.<sup>45</sup>

Completed during the gold boom period of Federation architecture in Western Australia, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* has a simple form, appropriate for a country railway station, but the eclectic combination of applied ornamentation in the Italianate chimneys and eaves corbels and arts and crafts detailing is characteristic of the Federation Free Style of architecture reflecting a new found confidence in the prosperity of the State at that time.<sup>46</sup>

*Northam Railway Station (fmr)* is built in load-bearing brick construction in Flemish bond with a pitched, timber framed, corrugated iron roof. The brick walls sit on a cement rendered stone plinth and have been painted. The present colour scheme, of predominantly red-brown walls and contrasting cream highlights, has been chosen in consultation with conservation architect, Kevin Palassis. The building is no longer symmetrical in form, due to the incorporation of the two end structures, but early drawings indicate symmetry was the original intention. The central entrance bay is given emphasis by its open bed pediment gable with timber mouldings which rises above the main roof level. A semicircular, timber roof ventilator is located centrally in the gable infill and a pointed, timber finial crowns the composition. Brick chimneys are located at regular intervals along the roof. Between the main roof and that of the verandah is a frieze of decorative, twin timber brackets extending along the full length of the elevation.

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<sup>43</sup> Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman, Memo Aug/Sep 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Pollard, Jeff. Railway Preservation Association Secretary/Chairman, Memo Aug/Sep 1995.

<sup>45</sup> Western Australian Govt. Rlys. drawing No. 3461, no date, shows three separate structures, yet WAGR Plan 4357 stamped "Completed 20-12-55" indicates spaces between the structures has been infilled.

<sup>46</sup> Apperly, Richard et al. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 136-139; National Trust Assessment Exposition, 25 February 1980.



The platform and entrance verandahs are sheltered by wide eaves supported on timber posts and brackets. The posts are set into tapering, concrete bases. Original drawings show a lattice screen valance to the entrance verandah. This valance is currently open as asbestos spandrels have been removed, although the intention is to replace these with timber latticework to match the original.<sup>47</sup> The central gable pediment is reflected in a smaller gable at the edge of the verandah line. The regular spacing of verandah supports produces a rhythmical expression with interest created in the fenestration pattern of the two main elevations. The shape of the windows of the approach elevation reflect the former function of the room behind with the timber counters of the post office and cloak room still in evidence. There are few doors in this elevation, primarily for security reasons.

Office accommodation extends along the length of the platform on either side of the entrance bay. Access to these offices is generally from the platform although some offices have interconnecting doors and share back to back fireplaces. Sanitary facilities are located at either end of the building with female toilets and showers at the western end and male facilities at the eastern end. The latter form an L-shape around the north-east corner of the building almost doubling the width of the building with square, high level windows located in the north elevation. The flat roof over this section provides another anomaly in the otherwise regular and consistent form of the building.

General internal finishes include timber floors and joinery, painted walls and ceilings some of which are ripple iron.

Western Australian Government Railway drawings 4357 and 4722 detail proposed improvements to the *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* buildings in 1955 and 1958 respectively. The alterations were relatively minor consisting of changes to internal planning with the addition or removal of partitioning, provision of new hand basins and office furniture and creating and closing of doorways.

More recently, *Northam Railway Station (fmr)* has been the subject of renovation works carried out with the assistance of a National Estate Program Grant in 1984-85. A detailed list of all works carried out is contained in the Final Report of the Northam Railway Preservation Society, January 1988 and includes the replacement of termite ridden flooring and vandalised toilet pans, and extensive patching and sanding to walls and ceilings.

Further renovation work is required which is subject to successful applications for grants from various sources.

### 13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

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<sup>47</sup> "Railway Preservation Group Report 1988."  
Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Doc'n