



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

Government Printing Office, with its pleasing architectural composition and complex fenestration, gives a lightness to the facade of an otherwise substantial heavily massed building. (Criterion 1.2)

Government Printing Office has significance for its creative design of an interesting corner tower, which addresses the corner of Murray and Pier Street and reduces the impression of the building's bulk. (Criterion 1.2)

Government Printing Office makes a strong visual contribution to its section of Murray Street, and is recognised for its contribution to the aesthetic and historic character of the western end of the Murray Street Heritage Precinct. (Criteria 1.3, 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Government Printing Office has historic value as it was designed, constructed and enlarged by the Public Works department for the offices of the Government Printer and, in subsequent extensions, represents both the growth and development of the Government Public Service and of the state in general. (Criterion 2.1)

Government Printing Office has significance for its association with the architectural designs of the Colonial Architect, George Temple Poole, Hillson Beasley and William Hardwick. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The building contributes to the fabric of Perth as an element surviving from a former phase of development. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Government Printing Office is an uncommon, surviving example of an utilities building built specifically by the PWD for a Government Department and expanded over a period of nearly thirty years from 1894 to 1922. It also includes modified remnants of the 1870 building. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The size and prominent position of *Government Printing Office* demonstrates the importance of the Government Printer's office in Western Australia at the turn of the century and the early 1900s. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

The interior of *Government Printing Office* has had a number of internal modifications but there is no deterioration of the fabric of the building. *Government Printing Office* is in good condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The interior of *Government Printing Office* has been modified as part of its use as offices; however, most of the alterations have not significantly intervened in the interior fabric of the building. The installation of modern services has not reduced the cultural heritage significance of the place.

Although the place is no longer used as a printing office, and is unlikely to be so again, the use of the building as offices of a government department which is associated with the dissemination of information, retains part of the original function of the place. *Government Printing Office*, therefore, has a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The modifications carried out over the years to *Government Printing Office* have involved the addition of new materials rather than the removal of original fabric. *Government Printing Office* retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Government Printing Office was built as a government office building in 1894, comprising a two storey building facing Pier Street and a two storey building on the corner of Murray and Pier Streets.¹ The building defines the corner site on the eastern intersection of Murray and Pier Streets, Perth. This prominent site is approached by rising ground from both north and west creating a strong visual element.²

The Government Printer was established, in 1870, in two storey premises on Pier Street.³ The Printer was responsible for the printing of Parliamentary papers, *The Government Gazette*, most of the official stationery of the various Government departments, and the publication of the scientific and professional papers prepared by the Government Geologist and other officers.⁴ The Government Printer was essential in this process as it printed parliamentary papers, bills, reports and departmental returns and other paperwork necessary to the smooth running of Government.⁵ The gold boom of the 1890s in the eastern Goldfield and the Murchison region, and the development of representative government in Western Australia, compelled the government to provide effective government services.⁶

The offices and workrooms at the *Government Printing Office* in Pier Street were deemed inadequate by 1891 and preliminary plans were drawn up to extend the building.⁷ In 1894, the *Daily News* described the conditions of the original workrooms and concluded:

...one might say to crowd a number of workmen into rooms lighted anyhow, ventilated nohow (sic), sweltering in summer and draughty in winter, designed by rule of thumb, and jumbled together like a rabbit-warren, is or was most costly kind of economics and justifiable only on plea of helpless poverty.⁸

New extensions were decided upon to rectify the situation. The 'extensions' comprised the construction of an entirely new building, taking up the entire setback on Murray Street, with a light well separating it from the original building.⁹

Government Printing Office was designed by George Temple Poole, Colonial Architect. Temple-Poole held the title of 'Colonial Architect' from 1891 until he retired at the end of 1896. He was also known as the Assistant Engineer in

¹ Oldham, R. & J. *George Temple-Poole : Architect of the Golden Years* (U. W. A. Press, Nedlands, 1980) p. 98; van Bremen, I. 'The New Architecture of the Golden Boom in Western Australian Government Buildings under the Direction of G. T. Poole 1885-1894' (Ph. D. thesis, Department of Architecture, UWA February 1990) p. 181.

² van Bremen, p. 180.

³ Battye, J. S. *The Encyclopedia of Western Australia* Vol. 1. (Hussey and Gillingham, Adelaide, 1912-13) p. 423.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*; *Daily News*, 16 February 1894, p. 3.

⁶ Oldham, p. 97.

⁷ *ibid.*; Battye, p. 422; van Bremen, p. 180.

⁸ *Daily News*, 16 February 1894, p. 3.

⁹ van Bremen, p. 180.

Chief.¹⁰ Construction of *Government Printing Office* commenced in December 1892 by contractors Arnold and Brown, and was completed in February 1894 for a cost of £4,144.¹¹

The evolution of the Western Australian Government services and the transformation from a rudimentary beginning, to that of a large, organised and more efficient body is embodied in the construction of the new *Government Printing Office* as it was the centre of production for the dissemination of information about government dealings on a larger scale than ever before.

The *Daily News* reported:

Time was when the colonial pace was slow almost to stagnation, and when the government departments required only such a moderated amount of printing as could be done in a few small rooms of primitive construction. The old printing offices were crowded and cramped beyond comparison, as it is strikingly manifest by contrast with the commodious new structure which is now being occupied and yet the increasing strain of the last three years compelled the production of a large amount of printing work which has been turned out creditably under severe conditions.¹²

Government Printing Office was described as a significant architectural and technological development in Western Australia. The press reported that the completed building was '..a creditable addition to the growing department of the Government.'¹³ The ventilation system, in particular, was considered innovative and it was reported by the *Daily News* that, '..the building has three floors, and each of them is ventilated in a manner rare in such buildings and truly admirable'.¹⁴ Later in the same article it was noted:

...the window lighting and ventilation throughout the new building are surpassingly good for work-room comfort and airiness. Hill and Son's patent regulators are fitted to all windows, and this convenience in a hot climate, for large or small rooms, will manifest.¹⁵

The ground floor of the building was used for offices, the first floor for the compositors, the third for 'stitching, binding and miscellaneous' uses.¹⁶

The compositor's room on the second floor was described thus:

The middle floor is most interesting being the compositor's room where the type-setting is performed. This room will command the admiration of experienced printers, for it is architecturally perfect, and the working facilities are ingenious, methodical, and uncommonly convenient.¹⁷

The external features of the building: the intricate brickwork, the three turrets with domes on the Murray Street facade and the Murray Street entrance with its recessed doorway and round-headed stucco canopy were commented upon as:

10 *Daily News*, 16 February 1894, p. 3.

11 Oldham, p. 97.

12 *Daily News* 16 February 1894, p. 3.

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*

..not showy, but is certainly interesting for its ingenious variety, artistic relief, and some feature of inexpensive adornment which are novelties in this city.

..it may be said that this is an admirable building for its purpose being substantial in construction, highly suitable for its use, moderately ornamental without expensive show, and an artistic addition to the street architecture of the city.¹⁸

By 1907, further additions were required because of the rapid expansion of the State Government services.¹⁹ Extensions to *Government Printing Office* of a third storey, together with a substantial four storey extension of the building on the eastern side of the Murray Street building.²⁰ The architect was Hillson Beasley, Chief Architect of the PWD.

Hillson Beasley was a British born and educated architect who migrated to Victoria and practised architecture in Melbourne in the 1880s. He joined the Western Australian Public Works Department in 1896, eventually succeeding John Grainger as Chief Architect in 1905. Beasley is noted for his 'blood and bandages' style of red brick public architecture; although he also designed in other styles. His handling of subtle repetitions of motifs is evident in the 'blood and bandages' *Fremantle Post Office* (1907) as well as *Government Printing Office*.

In 1922, the building was extended again with a fourth storey, designed by William Hardwick, Chief Architect of the PWD, added to the 1894 building.²¹ The altered building was, thus, a substantial four storey building addressing both Pier and Murray Streets with a two storey section addressing Pier Street.

The finished design of the building reflects the progressive development of Western Australia from a colony to a state of some distinction and wealth. The classic features of turrets, domes and the strongly expressed Murray Street entrance, tacitly expresses the stability and permanency of the Western Australian government and its services.

Government Printing Office is no longer used as a printing office. The Government Printing Services moved to new premises in the late 1960s. *Government Printing Office* was sold to Telecom. In the 1980s, the building was used as a telecommunication museum and offices by Telecom but, subsequently, the museum was closed and the contents dispersed to regional centres. *Government Printing Office* is now used for offices on the ground floor, for Telecom's Telstra Learning Centre on the first and second floors, and the third floor remains vacant.

Government Printing Office is one of a number of buildings in the Murray Street precinct, recognised by the National Trust of Australia as a 'collection of buildings and elements on notable architectural interest, displaying a harmony of scale and character of a period.'

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

18 *ibid.*

19 Oldham, p. 97.

20 van Bremen, p. 181.

21 *ibid.*

Government Printing Office is a four storey building which addresses the corner of Pier and Murray Streets Perth.

It is the tallest of several buildings, sited in close proximity to each other and, collectively, forming the Murray Street East heritage precinct. While the central portion of Murray Street is characterised by retail shops and commercial offices, the eastern end consists of buildings that are government owned or for community use including: *Royal Perth Hospital, The Fire Station, Young Australia League, Salvation Army Citadel, and St. Mary's Cathedral.*

Government Printing Office is a strong corner building which is important in a grid street system. It is also important as an entry into the precinct and gives emphasis to the significance of this eastern end of Murray Street. It is approached by rising ground from both the north and the west, although the original impact of its mass has been reduced somewhat with the construction of the multi-storeyed Perth City Council carpark on the north-west corner of Pier and Murray Streets. Nevertheless, the building makes a strong impact on the streetscape.

Government Printing Office is constructed of load bearing brick in a subdued version of the Federation Free Style and utilises motifs which are romanesque in character. The building is rectangular in shape with the long axis addressing Murray Street. It addresses the corner at an acute angle but the impact of the angle is reduced by the projecting corner tower surmounted by a cupola which creates a strong upward line and reduces the bulk of the building.

The building has flemish bond brickwork with a strongly modelled base and floral detail at pedestrian level. The basement is heavily modelled, with a plain walled first floor, while the second floor features a system of pilasters, piers and paired windows. Modulation in the brickwork creates visual texture. The arcades and bays caused by the arch headed windows and the classical order, creates dynamic rhythm across the facade of the building. Pressed cement ornamentation are applied to prominent architectural features: the entrance, the base of the tourelles and the eaves cornice. The entrance is characterised by a curved portico which features the words 'Government Printing Office' above in brass lettering.

Government Printing Office was built in two stages: the western section in 1894, and the eastern extension, in 1907, which incorporated the two storey 1870 building and gave it a new facade to match the Pier Street elevation of the 1894 building and rebuilt the northern wall.

Extensions to the three storey building, in the form of another storey to the 1894 building, took place in 1922. Even so, the final appearance is of an harmonious building. Care has been taken by the various architects to replicate previous architectural detailing to unify the structure.

The main entrance to *Government Printing Office* is in the 1894 building and is ornamented with a heavily recessed doorway which has articulated stucco detailing and a projecting portico with ornate frieze work. The doorway is romanesque in character and features two timber panelled doors with clear glass lights.

The 1907 extension is characterised by brick work and fenestration in the same style as the earlier building, although in a slightly reduced scale. At the

junction of the two buildings a service entry with large timber doors fitted into a arched entrance, was built. This both echoes the main entrance in a more subdued fashion and enables the new construction at the building edge to be less noticeable. The original projecting tourelle at the eastern corner was left in place and replicated at the eastern corner of the new extension.

Government Printing Office has timber flooring. The eastern wall of the 1894 building is readily distinguishable within the structure and large arches were cut into the original stairwell to facilitate access from the 1894 structure to the 1907 building.

The south-eastern corner of the building has had created within it, at some time, a new stairwell to all storeys. A new brick wall has been built and a fire rated metal stair put in place, through which all floors can be accessed.

Probably at the same time, the original stair opposite the main entrance has been removed, although the walls of the stairwell in the floors remain insitu. There is also a modern goods style lift in the building in the eastern end of the building. Although van Bremen indicates that 'the drawings appear to indicate a lift as part of the design', it is not clear if this is the same well.²²

The building has been modernised in the form of carpeting, lighting air conditioning, hygiene facilities, partitioning and some cabinetry. In the most part, these do not alter the original fabric of the building and could be easily removed.

The first floor and second floors are substantially as constructed. Internal stud walls have been inserted to divide up spaces and create offices and meeting rooms. Modern toilets have been installed on the eastern wall on all floors whereas, previously, there were toilets on the first and third floors only. On the first floor, service ducts are suspended from the ceiling in large white tubular ducts containing air conditioning, computer and electrical services. On the second floor the services are disguised by a suspended ceiling.

On the northern side of the building is a stair well which accesses Pier Street. At the top of the stair well is a small room, with cloak rails on the walls, which has windows on three sides. There is an impression in the floor from a weighty piece of machinery and external evidence that the eastern wall of this area originally had a large loading bay. It is consistent with the marks on the floor, that the room may have housed a small crane for raising and lowering printing materials.

The interior of the building is characterised by good light ingress on all floors, except where internal partitioning has blocked out the natural source. Hill and Son's patent regulators, which were fitted to all the windows in 1894 and are mentioned in contemporary sources, are nowhere to be seen but, most probably, were removed in the 1922 century extension to the building. There are vortex ridge ventilators in the roof.

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition, 22 December 1987

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet

²² *ibid.*

