



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 entrance gates on Gordon Street, the formal approach to the residence, and the views over the town of Northam, and large Moreton Bay Fig Tree enhance the aesthetic qualities of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

The unusual design of *Uralia*, with its large Moreton Bay Fig Tree, and its long approach to the house from the entrance, contributes to the streetscape and ambience of Gordon Street. This is reinforced by *Uralia's* close proximity to other large residences, *Byfield House* in Gordon Street and *Fermoy* in Uralia Terrace, which create a minor precinct of large gracious houses built at the turn of the century. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Uralia is a reminder of the growth in wealth that occurred in Northam in the 1890s and early twentieth century, as the town developed into a major railway and agricultural centre as a result of the gold boom. (Criterion 2.2)

Uralia has historic value for its close association with the Throssell family, members of whom were prominent in political, commercial and social spheres, at both State and local level. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Uralia contributes to Northam's sense of place by demonstrating the prosperity and development brought by the expansion of the railway during gold boom. As one of the more substantial residences built in the Town, *Uralia* continued the tradition of constructing large private residences, on substantial parcels of land, in Gordon Street. (Criterion 4.2)

Uralia contributes to the community's sense of place through its use as the maternity hospital for the Northam district for twenty five years. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Built in a period when large residences were generally in the Queen Anne style, *Uralia* is a rare example of the residential architecture of H. J. Prockter's expressive interpretation of the Federation Free Style, which he more commonly used for public buildings. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Uralia demonstrates the domestic life of the successful mercantile class at the turn-of-the-century. The design, orientation and landscaping of the property was typical of the period for large scale residences, and is representative of the large residences built for the more affluent citizens of Northam. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

Following repairs carried out in the early 1990s, and a program of maintenance by the current owners, *Uralia* is in very good condition .

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The layout of the place is intact and the place is used as a residence as originally intended. *Uralia* retains a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Apart from recent (1990s) repairs to the house and gardens, *Uralia* retains its original exterior and many interior features. Alterations made to the fabric to convert it to a hospital have been successfully reversed. Although the bathrooms and kitchen were modernised in the early 1990s, and some interior trims have been replaced, the work was carried out sympathetically. *Uralia* retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Julia Ball, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Kelly Aris, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Uralia is a single-storey brick and stone residence, built in 1902-03 for George Lionel Throssell, known as Lionel.

The town sites of Northam, York and Beverley were reserved by the Lands Department as early as November 1830. Development was slow and it was not until 1879, that Northam was declared a municipality. In the early 1890s, both York and Northam campaigned the government to commence the proposed Yilgarn railway from their respective towns. Northam won the battle and while the gold fields railway was under construction, gold discoveries were made in Coolgardie (1892) and Kalgoorlie (1893). As a result, Northam developed rapidly as a major railway, agricultural and commercial centre and soon outstripped York and Newcastle (Toodyay) in size and importance.¹

The growth of Northam brought about layout changes in the town, the new railway line extending from West Northam station through the town. A land and building boom accompanied the increase in population, especially after 1895, as new housing, business premises and public buildings were erected throughout the town. New estates were opened up on the east, west and northern sides, '... each with its particular character'.²

In contrast to what were considered 'working class' developments was the development which occurred on the hill above the eastern end of town, Northam's 'nob hill'. During the 1890s and early twentieth century this area was firmly established as the most prestigious part of Northam. A number of large houses, with influential owners, *Fermoy* (built for George Throssell) and *Byfield House* (built for James Byfield), had already been built when George Lionel Throssell constructed *Uralia* in 1902-03, on a 17 acre site.³

In August 1902 tenders were invited, 'for the erection of a Large Stone Bungalow Residence at Northam for Geo. Lionel Throssell, Esq.'⁴ Born in Northam in 1863, Lionel was the son of George Throssell, who was Northam's first Mayor and later, in 1901, briefly Premier of Western Australia. The Throssell family figured prominently in Northam's commercial and political activities. Lionel was elected Mayor for three consecutive years, during which time he presided over the installation of both the electric lighting and telephone systems. He was one of the

¹ Garden, D. S., *Northam, an Avon Valley history* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979), pp. 137, 148 - 149.

² Garden, p. 150.

³ C/T 259/164 indicates ownership of land was in the name of Isabella Roberta Throssell.

⁴ *Northam Advertiser* 30 August 1902, p. 3.

founders of the Northam Agricultural Society and a partner in Throssell, Son and Stewart, the largest merchant business in Northam.⁵

The *Northam Advertiser* noted that, 'the tender of Messrs. Deague and Skinner has been accepted for the erection of a brick and stone bungalow residence for Mr. Geo. Lionel Throssell. The residence will cost between £2,000 and £3,000.'⁶ The residence was designed by Mr. Henry J. Prockter. Prockter was an English trained architect who emigrated to Tasmania in the 1880s. He then moved to Melbourne, where he worked in a number of firms, before establishing his own practice during the building boom of the late 1880s. The development of his idiosyncratic architectural style is evident in the numerous buildings he designed in Melbourne. Following the downturn in the building industry in Victoria in the early 1890s Prockter arrived in Perth, in 1896, establishing his architectural practice, as well as taking up an appointment as Secretary to the Roads Board Association.⁷ Prockter was also responsible for a number of other Northam buildings including, the Freemasons' Hall (1896), *Northam Town Hall* (1897), and at least three hotels (1902-04).⁸

Throssell continued to improve his property, in 1905, the landscaping work featuring in the *Northam Advertiser*:

Neatly, well kept gardens in and around the town of Northam are very much to be desired as well as deserving of being encouraged. It is therefore very gratifying to note that Mr. G. L. Throssell of "Uralia," Gordon Street, has given a great deal of attention to laying out his grounds in an artistic as well as a pleasingly attractive manner, with the result, that "Uralia" is now a place that will give the utmost satisfaction to lovers of flowers and shrubs, and also to those who can, at the same time, appreciate landscape gardening. ... Besides a magnificent display of flowers and shrubs, there are also well kept gravel walks, which give a peculiar charm to the surrounding ground. Mr. Throssell has also laid down a first-class bowling green, and also formed a very neatly kept tennis court.⁹

The continued growth of Northam saw the development of numerous new businesses along Fitzgerald Street and the decline of Peel Terrace as the main business site. This decline was partially responsible for the disappearance of Northam's oldest business, Throssell, Son and Stewart. Before George Throssell died in 1910, Lionel had borrowed heavily to keep the company solvent. Lionel was bequeathed the debts of his father's will, but in the slump of 1911, many farmers were unable to pay for machinery they had acquired and without other resources to fall back upon G. L. Throssell and Co. went out of business. Lionel made his living by running a small general agency.¹⁰

A proposal to subdivide the property in 1924, was reported in the *Northam Advertiser*:

⁵ Battye, J. S., *The Cyclopedia of Western Australia* (Hussey & Gillingham, Adelaide, 1913), Vol. 2, pp. 533-34; Erickson, R. (ed) *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians pre 1829 - 1888* (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1988), p. 3062.

⁶ *Northam Advertiser* 10 September 1902, p. 2.

⁷ Refer to HCWA assessment P3320.

⁸ *Northam Advertiser* 30 August 1902, p. 3.; Information supplied by present owner.

⁹ *Northam Advertiser* 25 January 1905, p. 2.

¹⁰ Garden, pp. 197-98.

The demand for good building blocks ... has decided to subdivide sublots 78 and 58 containing 16 acres, being part of "Uralia" and the adjoining land. This will be laid out in very attractive style, the blocks of good size; and being right on the crown of the hill fronting Gordon and Throssell-streets should command a ready sale. The site is unequalled in Northam, and the prices and terms will be within reach of everyone.¹¹

In February 1924, it was reported that a Mrs. F. Dean had leased *Uralia*, transforming it into a hostel for children attending school in Northam, '... there are spacious grounds, several acres in extent, well laid out tennis courts and everything that could be desired to make matters homely for children away from home.'¹²

It is not known for how many years the place continued to be used as a hostel; however in 1926, the place was sold to Lurline Katie Dale.¹³ Circa 1943, the place became a private hospital. The difficulties of staffing such a hospital in the country proved insurmountable, and in 1947 it was forced to close.¹⁴ *Uralia* was taken over by the Sisters of St. John of God, the place being officially opened, as a maternity hospital, by His Grace the Archbishop on 25 January 1948. Extensive renovations were undertaken by architect, Mr E. Le B. Henderson and contractors, Mr. Guthrie and Son, to provide the required medical facilities.¹⁵

Extensive renovations were undertaken by the Sisters, and now the building has taken on the appearance of our other hospitals - white walls, gleaming tiles, spotless linen and shining stainless steel.¹⁶

The hospital operated for twenty five years, being the main maternity centre until the opening of the new Northam Regional Hospital in 1970. In 1971, the Sisters changed the use of St. Johns into a geriatric centre and, in 1973, the facility closed and the St. John of God Sisters left the district.¹⁷ The property was formally sold to the Roman Catholic Church in January 1974.¹⁸

Uralia was then used as a monastery for the Marist Brothers while they were teaching at the nearby St. Joseph's School. The brothers occupied the building for about eight years. It was then used by the school for extra classes and bus parking in the early 1980s, before being leased out to tenants as a private residence in 1985.¹⁹ In 1988, it was sold to private owners who began a process of renovation and landscaping.²⁰

In November 1995, *Uralia* is used for residential purposes.

¹¹ *Northam Advertiser* 9 January 1924, p. 2.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ C/T 923/44.

¹⁴ *The Record* 29 January 1948, p. 1.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Daily News* 16 August 1973, p. 3.

¹⁸ C/T Volume 923, Folio 44.

¹⁹ Information supplied in 1995 by owner, held on HCWA file P1843.

²⁰ C/T Volume 923, Folio 44; Information supplied in 1995 by owner, held on HCWA file P1843.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Uralia is an imposing single-storey residence on a 2-acre site in Gordon Street built in the Federation Free Style.²¹

Uralia is sited at the intersection of Gordon Street and Uralia Terrace. The building is set back from the street alignment on elevated ground, and is orientated with a corner bay window to take advantage of extensive views north overlooking the town of Northam.

The principal facade of the building addresses Gordon Street. *Uralia*, together with *Fermoy* (built for George Throssell c. 1890s) in Uralia Terrace, and *Byfield House* (c. 1890s) in Gordon Street, is one of three large residences in close proximity to each other.

The building is raised on a rubble stone plinth, and is approached by a small staircase with a solid balustrade. The residence is in a landscaped setting and has a formal approach along a bituminised circular driveway in front of the house accessed from an original entrance off Gordon Street, and continues to a second entrance off Uralia Terrace. A large Moreton Bay Fig Tree on the northern boundary of the site is a town landmark.

The exterior of the building is a combination of brick, stone and roughcast render which provides a visual contrast. Red brick, tuck-pointed brickwork is on the west (front) and north elevations, and roughcast render is on the gable wall and bay windows. The building has a prominent hipped and gabled roof covered in corrugated iron. The main roof features ornate, slender brick chimneys, and extends to cover an encircling verandah.

The south-west corner of the house is truncated by a curved wall which is capped by a rendered parapet that appears to rise through the roof - a classical element in an unusual context. Italianate balustrading decorates the parapet.

The building is asymmetrical with a well proportioned tower in the centre of the front elevation. This central tower dominates the elevation in size and detail. The tower was crowned by a belvedere which was demolished in the 1940s.²² The tower features three semi-circular arches supported on rectangular columns in tuck-pointed brickwork. Above the arches, the walls are carried up in brickwork and are capped with a rendered entablature with Art Nouveau and classical mouldings. Rendered Italianate balustrading surrounds the top of the tower on which the belvedere sat. The tower is accessible through the roof space, which has been sealed.

The front elevation also features a gable with half timbered effect in the gable wall and a gable finial at its apex. A frieze of curved timber emphasises the horizontal line of the verandah. The verandah roof is supported on turned posts with slim timber balusters.

²¹ Apperly, R., Irving, P., Reynolds, P., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture, Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* (Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 136-139.

²² The belvedere was designed with a square pyramidal roof with an iron palisade decorating the roof summit. The reason for its removal is unknown.

Uralia is characteristic of Prockter's residential designs, with a south-west corner truncation, asymmetrical elevations, gabled and hipped roofs, prominent towers and roof parapets (*Windsor Hall*, 1904).

The exterior of the building also features rendered sill mouldings and two bay windows with leaded and stained glass fanlights. The entrance features timber panelled doors with leaded and stained glass panels, fanlights and sidelights. Windows are double-hung sashes and tall, slender french doors lead on to the verandah.

In the interior of the building, the entrance passage features an archway that rests on pilasters. Decorative cornices and roses adorn the ceilings although many are new installations. Light fittings, most picture rails and skirting boards are also recent installations. Terrazzo floors, laid during the residence's occupation by the hospital, have been covered. The remaining floors are timber, now covered with carpet or linoleum in the kitchen. Ceilings were lathe and plaster throughout; however, with the exception of the ceiling in the passage, many were replaced with asbestos lining, when the residence functioned as a hospital.

The residence accommodates a formal dining, living area, kitchen, laundry, four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a cellar. Outbuildings included an ablution block (demolished 1988), boiler room (no longer extant), laundry/shed (1953) and brick and tile residence (1977). A timber framed dormitory, built while the Marist brothers occupied the house and later converted for use as a chapel, was demolished in 1988, along with steps and balustrade that lead from the house to the dormitory. No evidence remains of the tennis court, bowling green and gravel paths.

In 1953, the verandah on the northern elevation was enclosed with louvred windows for use as a sleep-out. In 1958, the south-east corner of the verandah was enclosed with showers.²³ In 1959, the dormitory, then used as a chapel was extended.²⁴

In the late 1980s, the solar hot water system was upgraded, air conditioning ducts were installed, the verandah enclosures on the north elevation were removed, a french door was created in an existing opening on the north elevation, the kitchen was extended, the windows in the kitchen were dropped two courses, and the kitchen was upgraded. An arched opening was created from the original kitchen through to the addition. Asbestos ceilings were removed and new linings installed. Swing doors, installed when the residence functioned as a hospital, were removed and the pilasters that supported the doors were restored. The bathrooms were upgraded, and the basin and bath were salvaged from the dormitory for reuse in the bathrooms. Hand basins installed in the rooms along the eastern side of the building, while the residence occupied as a hospital, were removed and the rooms converted for use as bedrooms. A baby nursery, at the southern end of the residence, was converted for use as a laundry and bathroom. This area originally formed part of the verandah, the nursery was an addition - match boarded ceiling in the addition is evident and windows of a later period to the original building remain in

²³ The National Trust of Australia (WA) file.

²⁴ *ibid.*

the addition.²⁵ Little evidence remains of the place having been used as a hospital. All stainless steel sinks and troughs have been removed from the kitchen and laundry.

In 1988, the south-east verandah enclosures and the ablution block were demolished.²⁶

In 1989, the roof was re-clad and some of the verandah posts were replaced. The cast-iron balustrading, an earlier addition, was removed, and slender balusters, similar in profile to the original, were installed. The brick outbuilding was converted to a self contained residence and verandahs constructed to the laundry/shed.²⁷

In 1990/91, site works were carried out to the property including: garden landscaping; construction of small retaining walls; and, new paths using recycled bricks from the boiler room. Other works included the installation of a swimming pool, construction of a gazebo - the roof tiles were recycled from the demolished ablution block - construction of a pergola, construction of a carport, and installation of new gates and construction of pillars to the Uralia Terrace entrance - built to match the existing on Gordon Street. Free-standing lattice screens were erected in front of the west elevation, the bituminised driveway along the northern side of the house was resurfaced and widened and, the verandah posts and roughcast render were painted.²⁸

In 1994, the current owners commissioned Conservation Architect Ronald Bodycoat to document the reconstruction of the belvedere. This work is due to commence early 1996.²⁹

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition.

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet.

²⁵ Details of alterations to building fabric after 1988, were provided in an interview with R. & M. O'Mara, 13 November 1995. See memorandum Heritage Council file P1876.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*