



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

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr) possesses a considerable degree of aesthetic value as it is a fine example of the Federation Free Classical style. The exterior details are of particular interest. (Criterion 1.1 & 1.2)

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr) is a landmark in North Fremantle because it exhibits unusual and dynamic aesthetic characteristics. (Criterion 1.3)

The unusual and monumental building makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Stirling Highway, North Fremantle. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The scale and stature of *North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr)* reflects the confidence of North Fremantle's civic leaders in the continued prosperity and growth of their town at the turn-of-the-century. (Criterion 2.1)

North Fremantle Town (fmr), together with the former Municipal Gardens and the War Memorial, defines a former civic precinct. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr), has for many years served as a focal point for community activity in the North Fremantle area. (Criterion 4.1)

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr) contributes to the North Fremantle community's sense of place and the history of the Town of North Fremantle, as was demonstrated by the strong community reaction when a development proposal was put forward to use the hall and surrounding area for a residential development. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr) is a demonstration of a style not unusual in Fremantle but uncommon in North Fremantle. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr) is significant in representing the dynamic and ebullient architecture for civic and commercial buildings in Fremantle, Perth and goldfield towns that conveyed the confidence and the importance given to local municipalities at the turn-of-the-century. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The condition of the place has not been affected by changes in function and management of the building. The general condition of the interior spaces is good, with most of the major spaces remaining relatively intact. The building exterior is in sound condition. Overall *North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr)* is in good condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

In the early 1960s, *North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr)* lost its original function of accommodation and municipal offices. The occupation of the building by various community groups has resulted in minor alterations to the building fabric. However, the exterior and the interior spaces remain largely intact and *North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr)* retains a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Alterations to the building fabric have been minimal, and the original design can be easily reinstated. A high proportion of original exterior and interior detailing remains. *North Fremantle Town Hall (fmr)* retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The former *North Fremantle Town Hall* is a two-storey building completed, in 1902, to provide municipal facilities for the North Fremantle community. The site comprises the Town Hall (1902) and Literary Institute (1906), a former tramway depot (now used as a store), a separate workshop building, a toilet block and a store.

The municipality of North Fremantle developed around the river, road and rail connection between Fremantle and Perth. A new bridge across the Swan River was built, in 1866, and lots in North Fremantle were subdivided on either side of the Perth Road. With the completion of the Fremantle-Perth railway line, in 1880, the number of North Fremantle subdivisions increased to cover the full area north to Rocky Bay.

Further development took place during the gold boom of the 1890s, which precipitated the rapid development of Perth and Fremantle. Representations were made to the Premier for many new public buildings. In North Fremantle, a Post Office (1892), Primary School (1894), Railway Workshops and Stores (1894-5), and a Station Master's House (1894-5) were built. In 1895, North Fremantle became a separate municipality. Construction and development continued with expanded railway services, and the construction of another new road bridge, and the development of the inner harbour area.¹

The construction of the *North Fremantle Town Hall* was a continuation of this development. The place was built to house the municipal functions of the new town. The foundation stone for the building was laid in September 1902, by the Hon. Premier W. H. Williams. The architect responsible was Mr G. Clark.²

The *North Fremantle Town Hall*, located in close proximity to the Municipal Gardens was the focus of community activities. In addition to the municipal function, the hall was used for local dances and concerts, picture shows, school balls and public meetings.

In 1906, the Literary Institute, a two-storey addition to the Town Hall, was carried out by architect J. F. Allen.³ The benefits of the newly opened Literary Institute and its contribution to North Fremantle were expounded in the local newspaper:

North Fremantle is essentially a self-contained district. Adjoining the splendid Town Hall is a Literary Institute, commodious and well ventilated, where recreation is provided for the mind. There is a capital selection of books, and all the newspapers and magazines are provided.⁴

The North Fremantle Municipal Council, on its own application, amalgamated with the Fremantle City Council in November 1961. As the

¹ Campbell, R. McK., 'The North Fremantle Post Office, 211-217 Queen Victoria Street. A Heritage Assessment for the Heritage Council of Western Australia', (HCWA, Perth, October 1991) p. 1.

² Kelly, I., 'Architectural Biography, 1890-1915' in 'The Development of Housing in Perth (1890-1915)', (Masters Thesis, UWA, 1991).

³ Burton, C., 'Heritage Study of North Fremantle', (for Fremantle City Council, May 1994), Item B.

⁴ Supplement to *Morning Herald* 17 December 1907.

North Fremantle Town Hall was redundant to the needs of the Fremantle Council, the place was sold at public auction for \$25,000 in April 1966.⁵

Since this time, the former *North Fremantle Town Hall* has been used for a variety of purposes. The West Australian Ballet Company used it as their headquarters from 1977 - 1980. The Fremantle Community School bought the place in mid-1980 and some renovation work was carried out. It also housed an Arts Centre, School of Yoga and several workshops.⁶

In 1993, the Fremantle Community School sold the former *North Fremantle Town Hall* to Chris and John Blinco, antique dealers, for \$130,000.⁷ In mid-1994, a proposal to redevelop the existing building into two residential units and a commercial tenancy and construct additional buildings on the site to accommodate a further five units, aroused a strong community reaction. Fremantle City Council received numerous written submissions against the proposal from local residents and business owners. The local newspaper also covered the debate extensively.⁸

At the time of writing this report, in January 1995, the issue has not been resolved and the former *North Fremantle Town Hall* continues to be used as an antique dealership.

The *North Fremantle War Memorial* (1923), located adjacent to the *North Fremantle Town Hall* and former Municipal Gardens, continue to be used regularly for Anzac Day ceremonies.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The former *North Fremantle Town Hall* comprising North Fremantle Town Hall (1902) and Library Institute (1906) is an imposing and unusual building in the Federation Free Classical style.⁹ It was built to accommodate offices on the lower level at the street facade, a hall, and ancillary accommodation above the offices.

Located on the eastern side of Stirling Highway in the commercial centre of North Fremantle, the place is bounded by Bruce Street at the rear and Harvest Road to the south. The building, with its former tramways shed at the rear, is adjacent to the former Municipal Garden and War Memorial to the south.

The building is rectangular in plan, built of stuccoed brickwork, is two-storeyed at the street facade and is heavily embellished with corinthian columns and pilasters.

The Federation Free Classicism style of the building incorporates both Mannerism, in its distorted use of classical elements and proportions, and the Baroque, in its dynamism.

The Federation Free Classicism style was prevalent in Western Australia during the prosperity of the 1890s and early 1900s, and the buildings erected

⁵ *Daily News* 21 May 1969.

⁶ *Daily News* 26 May 1981.

⁷ *Fremantle Gazette*, 22 June 1983.

⁸ HCWA P1038, copies of submissions received by Fremantle City Council; *Fremantle Herald*: 30 July 1994, p. 11, 20 August 1994, p. 1, 27 August 1994, 30 August 1994, p. 26, 31 December 1994, p. 6.

⁹ 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) pp. 104-107.

in Perth, Fremantle and the goldfield towns convey the confidence of these boom years. Examples of this idiom include *Titles Office*, Perth (1897), *His Majesty's Theatre*, Perth (1903), *Boulder Town Hall* (1908), and *York Town Hall* (1911).

The originally symmetrical facade was extended north in 1906 to accommodate a Literary Institute.¹⁰ The facade is dominated by complex and heavily embellished treatment on the upper level of the original building which contrasts with the austere treatment on the lower level and the textures and treatment of the addition.

The original building is a facade of projections and recessions. Created of five bays, the central and end bays project beyond the wall alignment. The upper level bays are framed by a corinthian order, with unfluted shafts, supported by consoles. The order carries an entablature and a parapet concealing the roof. The shafts of the corinthian order feature festoons.

Each bay contains round arched sash windows recessed behind the outer face of the building. The windows have deep cut moulded architraves that are connected at their springing point by corinthian pilasters.

The interior of the building comprises a central passage, with offices either side, which directly leads to the hall. At the far end of the hall, change and wash rooms flank the raised stage. The residential accommodation is on the upper level above the offices and is accessed by a staircase located off the passage. The stair pierces a mezzanine that overlooks the hall. Four sets of double doors allow direct access from the hall to public amenities, store rooms and a courtyard. The two-storey addition in 1906, added rooms to the street facade, a semi-enclosed courtyard and a long narrow hall.

The entrance to the main building has a semi-circular opening that contains a fan light. The lower level windows are long sashes with hood-moulds.

The building was originally designed with three domical vaults with iron crestings and a flagpole that crowned the roof. Photographic evidence suggests the vaults existed in 1903 but not in the 1940s with the flagpole existing until the late 1980s.¹¹

No attempt was made to replicate the treatment of the original facade on the two-storey addition. Although in keeping with the rhythm of the original building, the texture and the features of the exterior are unrelated. The street facade is recessed behind the original building and is divided into two bays. The articulation of the lower level is given a horizontal emphasis with banded wall treatment unrelated to any other part of the building, and vertical emphasis with a free interpretation of a Palladian motif of three arched openings, accentuated keystones and rendered dressings. The upper level features square sash windows with moulded semi-circular arch surrounds and accentuated keystones.

The relatively plain and delicate building interior does not match the dynamism of the exterior. A carved timber staircase, small decorative ceiling

¹⁰ *West Australian*, 2 July 1906, p. 7.

¹¹ For historic photographs, see Burton, Item No. B, p. 3.

roses and decorative cornices, some with festoon motifs, feature in the interior.¹²

The outbuildings: the former tramways depot; now used as a store; a workshop building, a toilet block and store, are no longer used and their condition is fair.

A new doorway was created on the street facade allowing street access to the office on the south side of the entry. The date the doorway was created is unknown. Photographic evidence shows the appearance of it in the 1940s.¹³ The building lost its original function of accommodation and hall in the early 1960s. Since its occupation by various community groups, minor alterations to the building fabric occurred, in particular, minor renovation work by the Fremantle Community School including replacement of the roof.¹⁴

A retail outlet of antique furniture occupies the former offices and hall on the lower level of the building. The building owner occupies the former ancillary accommodation on the upper level.

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition, September 1980.

¹² For photographs of the interior and a measured drawing of the building, see Kriziotis, E., Ang, G. W., Tan, S. C., 'North Fremantle Town Hall, Measured Drawing', (unpublished student report, Curtin University, n.d.).

¹³ For historical photographs, see Burton, Item No. B, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Daily News* 26 May 1981.