



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the historic precinct.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.8.6 Building & maintaining railways

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 202 Rail & light rail transport
- 106 Workers

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The elements of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* demonstrate aesthetic characteristics valued by the community, in particular the Federation-period Vernacular style brick and iron cottages and residences in the Inter War Californian Bungalow style. (Criterion 1.1)

The townscape of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* is a landmark in Merredin in association with the Railway Institute and adjacent station precinct, including the water tower and former Station. (Criterion 1.3 & 1.4)

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin is important for the aesthetic character created by the alternating residences of similar design stretching over two street blocks in the main street of Merredin. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin was constructed as a result of the development of branch lines from the Eastern Goldfields railway line into the surrounding agricultural areas, making Merredin a major railway junction requiring substantial housing for railway employees. (Criterion 2.1)

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin was constructed by WAGR between 1913 and the 1970s to provide employee housing for the extensive railway operations in Merredin. (Criterion 2.2)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin is closely associated with the Western Australian Government Railways and the important part it played in opening up the State for agricultural settlement and the establishment of Merredin as a junction and country centre of some importance. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin is valued by the local and wider community for its association with the considerable railway presence in Merredin and in particular by the many railway employees and their families who have lived in the precinct from its inception in 1913 to the present day. (Criterion 4.1)

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin contributes to the local community's sense of place, being an early and significant part of the town of Merredin and a reminder of the town's substantial railway history. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin contains two blocks of departmental dwellings which are a rare instance of such a comprehensive example of railway housing, and in association with the adjacent railway precinct, including the water tower and former station, and the Railway Institute, is significant in Merredin's role as a railway junction and informs of the strong railway presence in the town. (Criterion 5.2)

The brick dwellings of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* built in 1913-1915 are the only known example of the use of brick for railway housing for waged employees. (Station master's, for whom this type of residence was normally built, were higher level salaried staff). (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The various elements of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* are representative of the type of housing provided for waged railway employees at different periods of the twentieth century. (Criterion 6.1)

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin is indicative of WAGR's former practice of providing employee housing near the place of employment. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Overall, most places are in fair to good condition, although there is little evidence of recent maintenance taking place.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The residences that make up *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* have functioned continuously as dwellings, originally for railway employees. Many are still occupied in that capacity while others are tenanted by non-employees. The historic precinct has generally retained a moderate to high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The residences of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* generally show minimal evidence of changes to the fabric. Many have verandah dado additions and the installation of later kitchen, bathroom and toilet fitouts and other replacements for aging interior fittings, including some ceiling replacements. Generally, the historic precinct displays a moderate to high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Conservation Consultant.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin comprises eleven brick and iron dwellings (1913-1915), six timber and tile Improved Mill type dwellings (1947), four Henry Martin type timber-framed asbestos and iron dwellings (1950) and two timber and tile 1970s residences situated at 71-89 Todd Street and 18-36 Kitchener Road Merredin. The houses were constructed by the Western Australian Government Railways Commission (WAGR) as accommodation for waged employees.

The Merredin district was first occupied by sandalwood cutters and pastoralists in the 1880s.¹ Following the discovery of gold in the Southern Cross and Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie areas in the early 1890s, a railway was constructed to service the new goldfields. The Eastern Railway, which had been constructed as far as Northam in 1886, was extended to Southern Cross in 1894, and reached Kalgoorlie two years later. The line between Northam and Southern Cross was originally referred to as the Yilgarn Railway, but once the line had been extended to Kalgoorlie it was renamed the Eastern Goldfields Railway.

The Merredin siding was about 4 km south of Hunt's Dam, a small settlement with a wayside inn on the York-Southern Cross road. With the opening of the railway, the inn was abandoned and the settlement moved to the siding. At Merredin siding a large granite rock, known as Merredin Peak, provided a good water catchment and a dam was constructed at the base of the peak by the Public Works Department in 1893. Water from the dam was pumped to the water tower in the railway yard where it was gravity fed to the railway engines.²

The Northam-Southern Cross section of the Eastern Goldfields Railway line was constructed by Joseph McDowell.³ The contract included construction of station buildings, and the first building at the Merredin siding was an open shed 12 x 18 feet (3.7m x 5.5m) on a 200-foot (60m) long platform. This was used as a waiting room and station building. There were also two two-roomed cottages for married permanent way men situated in the railway yard.⁴ The Station Master's house was built in 1896, when Joseph McDowell won the contract to build 25 such houses along the Northam-

¹ Ewers, John K. *Bruce Rock: The Story of a District*, Bruce Rock District Road Board, 1959, pp. 10-13.

² PWD Plan 2364, 12 June 1893; Report on the Workings of the Government Railways and the Roebourne-Cossack Tramway, Perth, Gov. Printer, 1905/1906, p. 38.

³ Gunzberg, A. & Austin, J., *Rails Through the Bush*, Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 227-228.

⁴ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 1 September 1892, p. 697; Law, F. A., *The History of the Merredin District*, Merredin Road Board, 1961, p. 14.

Southern Cross line at a cost of £9,375.⁵ That same year, waiting room additions for the line were contracted out.⁶

In 1904, the locomotive depot at Southern Cross needed to be moved west and Merredin, halfway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, was considered the perfect site. A townsite was surveyed that same year, and the railway presence grew with the establishment of a coal depot and the construction of barracks accommodation on the north side of the railway yard.⁷ In 1907, a refreshment room, a small one-room building, was added at Merredin station.⁸

As well as servicing the goldfields, the railway opened up the district for settlers on the land. Branch lines were constructed into the new wheat growing areas to provide better transport for farm produce and supplies.⁹ The opening of branch and spur lines, such as the railway loop line to Dowerin (1911), the Bruce Rock-Quairading-York line (1913), and the Bruce Rock-Corrigin-Narrogin line (1914) made Merredin a major railway junction.¹⁰ The enlargement of the railway system centred on Merredin meant more staff were required permanently in the town. In 1911, Reserve 13267, with an area of almost 42 acres (17ha) was gazetted for the purpose of railway employee quarters. The Reserve was situated on the south side of the yard, the opposite side to the singlemen's barracks.¹¹

It was reported in the *Merredin Mercury* on 27 November 1912, that £13,000 had been allocated for railway housing in the town and tenders had been called, but nothing further had been heard. Tenders were advertised in the *West Australian Government Gazette* in September that year, but no acceptance of a tender was advertised, although contract no. 105, dated 2 October 1912, is recorded in the WAGR Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966.¹² When there had still been no start on construction by March 1913, a petition was prepared for submission to the Commissioner. A number of married men had transferred to Merredin on the understanding that the houses were to be provided, but the Commissioner reported that he did not intend to build them at that moment.¹³ By June, however, construction was under way:

Merredin residents will be pleased to know that the long talked of railway cottages are to be erected immediately. The total number of 20 are to be built as follows:- 10 of four rooms, nine of five rooms, and one of six

5 *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 12 June 1896, p. 965.

6 *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 3 January 1896, p. 5.

7 Law, F. A. op cit, pp. 18 & 26; Works & Ways Plan 23753, 20 August 1925.

8 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1907, p. 77; *Merredin Mercury*, 3 March 1915, p. 2; *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 1907, p. 3130.

9 Stannage, C. T. (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, Perth, UWA Press, 1981, p. 250.

10 Gunzberg, A. & Austin, J., pp. 206-207.

11 DOLA Reserves Index Enquiry, Reserve 13267; 1938 plan of reserve, WAGR file, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1, SRO, AN262/1 ACC 1240 Item 1987/38; Law, F. A. op cit, pp. 18 & 26.

12 *West Australian Government Gazette*, 20 September 1912, p. 4087; WAGR, Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966, SRO, AN 260 ACC 2581.

13 *Merredin Mercury*, 27 November 1912, p. 2; 15 January 1913, p. 2; 26 March 1913, p. 2.

rooms, all of brick, which should prove quite a little town by itself, and present a better view to the visitor to our town than the ungainly camps now being allowed to put in an appearance by the Railway Department on the south side of the line. Portion of the material is already at hand and a line is being laid down from the railway yard to the site of the buildings whereby all material can be shunted direct to the spot, and when we have the 20 families settled amongst us rejoicing (or otherwise) should take place.¹⁴

An editorial on the matter followed the next week:

For some time now a gang of men have been engaged clearing the site... That the construction of the cottages is to be proceeded with is an indication that Merredin is receiving the recognition that its importance demands at the hands of the Government. When it is remembered that a large running shed has just been completed and that a proportionately large fitting shop is at present in course of construction, which will necessitate the employment of a larger staff, it is imperatively necessary that some provision should be made for housing of the men, especially in the case of married men with families. The principal cause of complaint in the past has been that a number of married men, through the lack of the necessary accommodation in the town have been put to unnecessary expense and inconvenience in the upkeep of two homes, besides having to live apart from their families.... Besides this, there is cause for congratulation in knowing that the cottages will, when erected, be ornaments in the town. Now that the ground has been cleared the various camps in the area have been brought to view, and they are anything but things of beauty. ... we welcome the action of the Railway Department, which will tend to give Merredin a more townlike appearance.¹⁵

In October, it was reported that some of the cottages were nearing completion but 'by far the greater number of them, however, have only reached the foundation stage.'¹⁶ In the 1915 WAGR *Annual Report* it was stated that ten cottages had been built at Merredin that year, presumably the last of the group of twenty.¹⁷ The twenty houses were numbered by WAGR as Departmental Properties (DP) 291-310. They were situated on Todd Street and Kitchener Road, on alternate lots, with a large recreation reserve situated south of Kitchener Road for the use of the residents.¹⁸ The brick railway houses were constructed to the standard plan for a station master's residence, with some variations in the number of bedrooms.¹⁹

Merredin's railway infrastructure continued to develop with the addition of a Signal Cabin (1913), improved Refreshment Rooms and timber footbridge (1915), and construction of new Waiting Rooms (1920).²⁰ There were 41 people employed at the Merredin Railway Yard in 1920, and 15,757 passenger journeys were booked at the station in the 1920-21 financial year.²¹ A small Railway Institute building was constructed on Todd Street

14 *Merredin Mercury*, 4 June 1913, p. 2.

15 *Merredin Mercury*, Editorial, 18 June, p. 2.

16 *Merredin Mercury*, 29 October 1913, p. 2.

17 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1915, p. 76.

18 1938 plan of reserve, op cit.

19 WAGR, EEL Plan 3463 & 5511, undated.

20 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1919, p. 67 & 1921, p. 58.

21 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1920 p. 59 & 1921, p. 58.

c.1920 for the benefit of the railwaymen stationed there. It provided a library and courses in railway working for employees to help with their advancement in the service, as well as serving as a social venue.²² In 1923, the Merredin railway network was extended with the opening of the Narrogin-Naremben branch line.

In 1927, Merredin had a new station building and refreshment rooms constructed as part of a programme of construction on agricultural lines due to the increased wheat harvests. Five departmental houses, of the standard Bungalow design, were built at Merredin in 1926-1927, on Kitchener Road and Ellis Street.²³ In the 1930s, the Railway Dam was enlarged and almost totally rebuilt by sustenance workers.²⁴ In 1932, there were 31 railway houses at Merredin, and 35 applications for departmental housing in the town, the longest waiting list in the State. As part of the expenditure for sustenance work, funds were made available for the erection of 12 houses for railway employees, four of which were built at Merredin.²⁵

For a number of years, there was ongoing correspondence between the Merredin Road Board, WAGR and the railway employees' unions regarding street making and drainage in the railway housing reserve. Because WAGR, in keeping with Government policy, did not pay rates on its land, the Road Board would not provide services. In 1938, twenty-five years after the first houses were built on Reserve 13267, the roads and footpaths were still unmade and there was no storm water drainage. WAGR and the Road Board eventually came to an agreement where they paid half the cost each. The Department eventually adopted the policy of paying local rates and adding the cost to the weekly rental paid by employee tenants in order for railway housing reserves to receive the same services as the rest of the town, but this was not instituted until after World War Two.²⁶

The shortage of available railway housing following World War Two was particularly noticeable at large rail centres such as Merredin where there were 83 employees on the waiting list for housing in January 1947.²⁷ WAGR initially attempted to manage construction of all the required housing:

The 'Improved Mill Type' house is of weatherboard construction, five rooms, tile roof, with all the usual conveniences and is of pleasing design. Thirty of these houses have already been constructed, or are under construction ... The 'Banksiadale' house is of 4 rooms with outer walls of fibrolite above a rusticated weatherboard dado and roof of corrugated fibrolite. The early erection of a further 19 of this type is planned.

22 HCWA database entry 1572; WAGR, *Annual reports*, 1920s and 1930s.

23 Merredin Railway Museum brochure; physical evidence; WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1926, p. 21 & 1927, p. 57; WAGR, Northam District photo album, photos of three Bungalows at Merredin, Properties section, WAGR headquarters, East Perth.

24 WAGR, Eastern Goldfields Railway File, SRO, ACC 1781/6200.

25 WAGR file, Provision of houses for employees, part 1, 20 July 1932, SRO, AN262/7 ACC 1389 Item 1769; WAGR, Northam District photo album, photos of three Group Settlement houses at Merredin, op cit.

26 WAGR file, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1, Item 1987/38, op cit.

27 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1948, pp. 17-19; WAGR file, Provision of houses for employees, part 2, October 1953, SRO, AN262/7 ACC 1389 Item 1769; DOLA, Reserves Index Enquiry, Reserve 13267.

In an endeavour to accelerate the provision of these houses a well-equipped woodworking workshop is being established at West Midland for the production of joinery and to carry out such pre-fabrication as is possible. Cabins and such like structures will also be manufactured there...

A continuous programme of improvements and additions, incorporating the provision of extra rooms, wash-houses, bath-rooms, fly-proof doors and window screens, installation of electric lighting, etc, was also authorised in accordance with applications received, while renovations and painting were carried out under the Deferred Maintenance programme. This programme was hampered by lack of available labour and the introduction of the 40 hour week.²⁸

A group of five Improved Mill type timber houses with tile roofs was built in 1947. They were part of contract no. 379, let in December 1946. The successful tenderer was G. McMullen with a price of £1,800 for labour only. Timber was supplied from WAGR's Banksiadale Mill, and roof tiles were provided by Wunderlich at a cost of £111.15.0 per house, corrugated iron being in short supply. The five houses were constructed on alternate lots between 67 and 85 Todd Street on Reserve 13267.²⁹

In 1950, a contract was let to Henry Martin & Co, for the construction of 14 Henry Martin type houses at Merredin. Contract no. 431, 19 December 1950, entailed the construction of eight five-room and six four-room 'timber and fibro houses' to a design approved by WAGR.³⁰ Three of these dwellings were built on Todd Street on the remaining vacant sites between the existing brick houses, and nine were built on the alternate vacant sites on the north side of Kitchener Road.³¹

In the early 1950s, three-room pre-cut houses, known as Simms-Cooke houses, were imported from Britain by the State Housing Commission. WAGR planned to take about 500 of these buildings and about 35 were built at Merredin, many in Muscat, Allbuery, Gilmore, Cunningham and Endersbee streets. These were timber houses with either iron or tile roofs. At least one four-room Banksiadale type house was built at Merredin during this period.³² Some houses were provided with galvanised iron chimneys because bricks and bricklayers were in short supply. Suitable established houses were also purchased as they became available, such as DP 1036, 1047-1049 & 1081, all acquired in 1952.³³ In 1955, new trainmen's barracks were built in brick, comprising 40 single bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge, dining room and ablution block. WAGR established an Advisory

28 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1948, pp. 17-19.

29 WAGR, *Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966*, op cit; WAGR, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1, op cit, Item 1987/38; WAGR file, Provision of houses for employees, part 2, October 1953, SRO, AN262/7 ACC 1389 Item 1769; WAGR, Property files for DPs 896-898 & 900, Properties section, op cit.

30 WAGR, *Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966*, op cit; CCE Plan 38084/2, 26 July 1949; WAGR, property files for DP 1004-1007 & 1009-1011, Properties section, op cit.

31 Physical evidence; 1938 plan of reserve, op cit.

32 WAGR, *Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966*, op cit; Plan of Reserve 13267, 1938; WAGR property files for DPs 896-900.

33 WAGR file, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1 & 2, Item 1987/38, op cit; WAGR, *Annual Reports*, 1952-1955.

Housing Committee at Merredin, as at other large railway centres, to assist with the allocation of its properties.³⁴

Railway houses were generally considered to be for short-term occupation of around three years, although there were railwaymen who remained in residence for much longer. Advancement in the service required mobility.

Almost since inception of railways in Western Australia this Department has provided some houses for its employees throughout the system... This need to provide houses for employees is dictated to a large extent by the very nature of our industry because railway staff, particularly those associated with operations, i.e. station staff, guards, drivers and trackmen, are transient and must move from depot to depot to gain experience and promotion. It would be impracticable, therefore, to expect such staff to provide their own houses and, indeed, as many are in the lower wage bracket it would be beyond their resources. Many houses at various locations are reserved specifically for nominated "key" personnel, but for obvious reasons reservations are kept to a minimum.³⁵

In 1953, Harold Boas, of the architectural firm Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown, provided town-planning advice to WAGR and the municipal councils at Merredin and Geraldton, where there were large numbers of railway houses. Boas recommended that future railway housing be spread throughout the town rather than congregated in one area, as this tended to create divisions between the railway employees and other residents. It was also suggested that the recreation area within the Merredin railway housing reserve be subdivided for more housing and another recreation ground established further from the residential area. WAGR instead made the recreation ground available for the use of the Railway Institute.³⁶

In the 1960s, there were changes to passenger rail services. Luxury Scenicruiser buses were introduced on the Perth to Naremburn route in 1961 while buffet cars and better accommodation on the trains to Kalgoorlie took away the need for Refreshment Rooms at the stations along the way, including at Merredin.³⁷ In October 1966, departmental accommodation available at Merredin comprised 102 houses (eight of which were reserved for 'supervisory personnel'), 40 single rooms in the trainmen's barracks, and 26 2-bed rooms and 4 caravans for the singlemen's quarters.³⁸

Construction of the standard gauge line from Perth to Kalgoorlie was begun in 1962 and completed in 1968. New facilities were constructed on the standard gauge line at Merredin, including a new station, composite gauge freight terminal, marshalling yard, and new storage and transfer facilities to handle the grain brought in on the narrow gauge agricultural branch lines.³⁹ With Kalgoorlie no longer the changeover point between the two gauges the

34 WAGR, *Annual Report*, 1955, typed notes 11 August 1955, p. 14.

35 'Railway Housing: A brief summation', 1974, a 2- page insertion in WAGR, *1972 Housing Review: Report on future housing requirements*, bound typescript, Battye Library.

36 WAGR file, Provision of houses for employees, part 2, Item 1769, op cit, October 1953.

37 WAGR, *Annual reports*, 1960-1965.

38 WAGR file, Merredin houses for employees, Part 1, 1966-1971, 27 October 1966, SRO WAS 1208 CONS 4780 Item R4951.

39 WAGR, *A Brief History*, 1975, pp. 7-8; Merredin Railway Station, Contract No C13-3, SRO, AN 260/CCE ACC 1786; WAGRC *Annual Report*, 1967, pp. 15-16.

station was downgraded and the WAGR Eastern District headquarters were removed to Merredin, taking effect from 1 July 1966.⁴⁰ By 1969, diesel locomotives had replaced the steam locos, and all locomotive servicing and maintenance was transferred to a new depot at Forrestfield. The locomotive depot at Merredin was closed.⁴¹

In 1966, records show that the Chief Traffic Manager recommended that 25 additional houses be erected at Merredin to meet Traffic Branch requirements.⁴² Following the 1972 WAGR housing review, Merredin's housing needs were ascertained at 84 dwellings, which meant that 18 of the existing houses were no longer required and could be scheduled for disposal. 84 of the remaining houses were to be upgraded to Government Employee Housing Authority (GEHA) standards and 14 houses were to be rebuilt. Both disposal and upgrading progressed slowly.⁴³ It appears that the timber and tile houses at 33 and 35 Kitchener Road date from this building campaign, and replaced two early 1900 residences.⁴⁴

In the 1980s, rationalisations, and changes in technology and services resulted in an overall decrease in Railways staff to 5,567 by 1988, and many railway houses were occupied by private tenants.⁴⁵ WAGR decided to divest itself of all its employee housing by 1997, and many houses in Merredin were sold for occupation or removal.⁴⁶ Only part of Reserve 13267 had been sewered in the 1960s, and the sections of Todd Street (57-69) and Kitchener Road (2-16) between Allbuery and Pereira streets could not be subdivided for sale until the sewerage was connected. It was suggested that if these houses were demolished there would be no need to install sewerage, but DP 301 (8 Kitchener Road) had already been sold with lease of land, so this idea was abandoned.⁴⁷ In 2001, no subdivision of this section of the reserve had yet been carried out.⁴⁸

As part of the Government Property Disposal process, those railway houses in *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* owned by WAGR underwent separate heritage assessments in 2001. The privately owned properties in the precinct have not been inspected, but as they were owned by WAGR into the 1990s, it is not expected that they are any different to the rest.

40 WAGR file, Merredin houses for employees, Part 1, 1966-1971, Item R4951, op cit, 28 October 1966.

41 WAGR, *A Brief History*, 1975, pp. 7-11.

42 Correspondence from Chief Traffic Manager to Deputy Secretary for Railways, 26 October 1966, WAGR File, Merredin houses for employees, Part 1, pp. 11 – 12, SROWA, ACC 4780 WAS 1208, Item R4951.

43 WAGR, various property files, Properties section, op cit.

44 Information & analysis provided by Irene Sauman in email, 23/12/2003, in P15750; 1938 plan of reserve, WAGR file, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1, SROWA, AN 262/1 ACC 1240, Item 1987/38; 'Railway Housing: A brief summation', 1974, a 2- page insertion in WAGR, *1972 Housing Review: Report on future housing requirements*, bound typescript, Battye Library. Note: The exact date of construction of the houses at 33 and 35 Kitchener Road has yet to be determined.

45 WAGR, *Annual Report* 1982 & 1988, p. 22.

46 Demolished for WAGR, October 1997, by Vince Maroni, WAGR property file for DP 1010, Properties section, op cit.

47 WAGR property file for DP 293, 2 January 1997, Properties section, op cit.

48 Merredin Public Plan 1:2000 BK35(2) 36:36, 27 April 2001; DOLA online title searches.

In 2002, the dwellings in *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* comprise: 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 83, 85, 87 and 89 Todd Street and 20, 22, 24, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34 and 35 Kitchener Road owned by WAGR, and 81 Todd Street and 18, 26, 30, 31 and 36 Kitchener Road in private ownership.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The dwellings located in Todd Street, otherwise known as Great Eastern Highway, are situated opposite and parallel to the railway line, on the south side of the town of Merredin. They are situated within a precinct of railway houses that extend along Great Eastern Highway (Todd Street) and Kitchener Road between Pereria Drive in the west and South Avenue in the east. The house and outbuildings at 31 Kitchener Road are of more recent construction and do not form part of this assessment.

The dwellings at 71, 75, 79, and 83 Todd Street are all of the same design: a brick and iron three-bedroom purpose built c 1900 dwelling for railway employees. The dwelling at 87 Todd Street is a four-bedroom version of the type, and each of the corresponding back-to-back places in Kitchener Road, at 18, 22, 26, 30, and 34 and across the road at number 29, are two-bedroom versions of the design.

These Federation era brick dwellings alternate with other purpose built railway houses. These are primarily of two different designs, with a Henry Martin Mill type house (1950) at 89 Todd Street and 20, 24, 28, 32 and 36 Kitchener Road and Improved Mill type houses (1947) with tile roofs at 73, 77, 81 and 85 Todd Street. The Henry Martin Mill type houses in Kitchener Road intersperse with the two bedroom c. 1900 brick dwellings. The two timber, fibro and tile residences at 33 and 35 Kitchener Road date from c. the 1970s and are standard State Housing Commission house types of this period.

The dwellings form a cohesive railway housing precinct opposite the Merredin railway station (standard gauge line) and slightly west of the Railway Station Museum, the station on the former narrow gauge line. The Railway Institute is located on Great Eastern Highway on the east corner of South Avenue, immediately adjacent to the housing precinct.

Brick dwellings typical (Plans 1, 2, 3)

All the brick dwellings have a steel post and wire fence that delineates the front boundary, with a central pedestrian gate entry and no vehicular entry. The remaining boundaries have supersix fences. There is vehicular access to the rear boundary by a gate from the right of way. The Todd Street sites slope down towards the north frontage and each of the places has a set of concrete steps up onto the concrete front verandah, which has a brick buildup. The Kitchener Road dwellings slope down towards the rear (north), and have brick steps at the rear. The exception is 29 Kitchener Rd, which is on the south side of the road, and has front steps.

The typical dwelling, purpose designed and built for railway employee accommodation, displays some characteristics of Federation-period

Vernacular style. Typical of the style, the building has a simple rectangular form, symmetrical façade, unsophisticated details and sash windows.

Each place is a single storey brick construction with a hipped roof, clad with corrugated iron. The red face brick is laid in a stretcher bond. The roof extends over the front verandah to form a skillion roof that is supported by evenly spaced square timber posts. Similarly, the roof forms a skillion at the rear. The face brick chimneys are corbelled.

The front verandahs are detailed with a series of horizontal overlapping boards forming a valance, and a c.1950s asbestos dado balustrade infill. The central front door is the original four-panelled door with sidelights and fanlight. The original timber framed double hung sash windows remain in place throughout the brick dwelling. The window openings are detailed with a double brick arch header and concrete sill. Square ogee profile gutters are in place but there is minimal evidence of downpipes to provide adequate discharge from the roof, or any ground level drainage.

The floor plan is simple with a central front door opening into a corridor with two rooms each side in the two bedroom (Plan 1) and three bedroom (Plan 2) versions. The three bedroom version has the additional room, the kitchen, on the left side beyond the corridor, opening off the vestibule, and the four bedroom version (Plan 3) has three rooms each side of the central corridor. The laundry/store is on the left and a bathroom and toilet on the right.

The main four rooms have the original 0.135 metre (5inch) timber floorboards. The walls and ceilings are lined with plasterboard, and the skirtings, architraves and original four panel doors are in place. Halfway down the corridor is a simple moulded archway. Two rooms on the right have moulded picture rails and back-to-back fireplaces, and the front room on the left has a fireplace. All fireplaces have the original mantles in place. The kitchen also has a fireplace, although in some places the original wood stove has been removed but the original mantle is still in place. The kitchen ceiling is lined with ripple iron on the rake. The rear door stepping down into the vestibule has a fanlight detail. The walls of the vestibule that are not painted face brick are lined with vertical tongue and groove boards. The toilet wall is painted face brick. The bathroom walls are plaster except the rear wall that is lined with vertical corrugated iron. The bathroom fitout comprises a boxed bath and porcelain basin attached to the wall, and the ceiling is lined on the rake with painted matchboard. The laundry has a concrete floor, and is clad with vertical corrugated iron on a timber frame that is unlined on the interior. The interior fabric of each place is predominantly intact throughout.

Most of the places have various standard WAGR outbuildings in the rear yards. The yards are generally unkempt with minimal gardens or plantings. Overall, most places are in fair condition, although there is little evidence of maintenance taking place. Some roofs have been replaced, and most of the rest are in fair condition, although many sheets of iron need refixing and flashings are rusted. The gutters are rusted and full of debris and the timber roof trims are badly weathered.

The Kitchener Road examples are interspersed with the occasional vacant block and with houses that have been altered, but generally reflect the same street layout and designs of the houses in Todd Street.

Improved Mill type houses (Plan 4)

The brick dwellings in Todd Street alternate with other purpose built railway dwellings. The places at 73, 77, 81 and 85 Todd Street are Improved Mill type houses with tile roofs.

All the Improved Mill houses have a steel post and wire fence that delineates the front boundary, with a central pedestrian gate entry and a vehicular entry on the east side. The remaining boundaries have a supersix fence, and there is also a vehicular opening on the rear boundary accessing the right of way. The sites are relatively flat, with a slight slope towards the Todd Street frontage.

The typical dwelling displays some characteristics of Inter-war Californian Bungalow style, although primarily the design is functional and purpose designed for railway employees within the availability of WAGR resources at the time. Typical of the of Inter-war Californian Bungalow style, the building is an unpretentious freestanding single storey house within informal gardens. It has timber structure and cladding and a Marseilles tile roof.

Each place is a single timber framed building with painted shiplap weatherboard cladding. The predominantly hipped roof is clad with terracotta clay tiles, and features a gable on the east frontage and a break pitch roof to cover the verandah, which wraps around three sides of the building. The windows on the front gabled wall, and on the east side, each have timber framed fixed awnings with flat iron cladding. The verandahs are supported by evenly spaced square timber posts and enclosed with dado height asbestos panels. The face brick chimneys are corbelled and have terracotta pots.

The front verandahs still have the original 0.100 metre (4inch) boards. The central front door is a flush panel door. The original timber framed double hung sash windows remain in place throughout the main dwelling. Square profile gutters are in place but there is minimal evidence of downpipes to provide adequate discharge from the roof, or any ground level drainage.

The floor plan is simple with a central front door opening into a corridor with two rooms on the left, one room on the right, and the kitchen straight ahead. The third bedroom opens off the kitchen on the left. Access to the back verandah is through the kitchen, with the bathroom on the left side of the verandah.

The main five rooms have the original 0.100 metre (4inch) timber floorboards. The ceilings are lined with battened plasterboard and the cornice has a horizontal simple decorative detail. The walls have a vertical tongue and groove timber dado wall, painted, with battened plasterboard above. The skirtings, architraves and original flush panel doors and hardware are in place. There is a fireplace back to back in the living room and the kitchen. The living room fireplace is face brick, painted, with corbelled brick detail supporting a plain timber mantel that has also been

painted. The kitchen also has a fireplace with the original wood stove and simple bracketed timber mantle, and the original basic three-cupboard sink fitout. The bathroom walls are plyboard and the fitout comprises a boxed bath and porcelain basin attached to the wall. The interior fabric of each place is predominantly intact throughout.

There is a detached skillion roofed laundry building at the rear of the dwelling. The laundry has a concrete floor, and is clad with vertical corrugated iron on a timber frame that is unlined on the interior. It is fitted out with a double concrete trough and brick copper, with the copper insert missing.

Most of the places have various standard WAGR outbuildings in the rear yards. The yards are generally unkempt with minimal gardens or plantings. Overall, most places are in fair to good condition, although there is little evidence of maintenance taking place. There are solar hot water systems in place on the rear roofs, and some have new hot water systems.

Henry Martin Mill type houses (Plan 5)

The brick places in Todd Street alternate with other purpose built railway dwellings. Henry Martin Mill type houses are on the corner of South Avenue at 89 Todd Street and at 20, 24, 28, 32 and 36 Kitchener Road.

All the Henry Martin houses have a steel post and wire fence that delineate the front boundary, with a central pedestrian gate entry and a vehicular entry on the east side. The remaining boundaries have supersix fences, and there is vehicular access to the rear boundary by a gate from the right of way. The sites are flat on Todd Street and slope to the rear on Kitchener Street.

The typical dwelling does not display any particular style characteristics. The design is functional and purpose designed for railway employees within the availability of WAGR resources at the time.

Each place is a single timber framed building with asbestos cladding. The hipped roof is clad with corrugated iron, and breaks pitch to cover the verandah that returns around half of the front and left side of the building. The verandahs are supported by evenly spaced square timber posts. The face brick chimneys are plain.

The front verandahs still have the original 0.100 metre (4inch) boards. The central front door has five obscure glazed panels in a vertical format. The original timber framed double hung sash windows remain in place throughout the main dwellings in most of the places, although 32 Kitchener Road has been replaced with aluminium framed sliding glass windows. Square profile gutters are in place but there is minimal evidence of downpipes to provide adequate discharge from the roof, or any ground level drainage.

The floor plan is simple with a central front door opening directly into the living room. Straight ahead is a doorway into a short corridor running left and right. On the right are two bedrooms and the bathroom, and on the left are another bedroom and the kitchen, which is also accessed from another

door in the living room. The kitchen leads out to the small rear verandah with the laundry on the left.

The main five rooms have the original 0.100 metre (4 inch) timber floorboards. The ceilings and walls are lined with battened plasterboard. The walls are battened in a horizontal format to dado height, and vertical format above. The skirtings, architraves and original flush panel doors and hardware are in place. There is a fireplace in the living room and the kitchen. The living room fireplace is face brick, painted, with corbelled brick detail supporting a plain timber mantel that has also been painted. The kitchen has a truncated corner fireplace with the original wood stove and simple timber mantel, and the original cupboard fitout. The bathroom fitout comprises a boxed bath and porcelain basin attached to the wall. The laundry has a concrete floor, and is clad with asbestos on a timber frame that is unlined on the interior. It is fitted out with a double concrete trough and a concrete plinth for the freestanding copper that has been removed. The interior fabric of each place is predominantly intact throughout.

Most of the places have various standard WAGR outbuildings, including the toilet, in the rear yards. The yards are generally unkempt with minimal gardens or plantings. There are solar hot water systems in place on the rear roofs, and some new hot water systems. Overall, most places are in fair to good condition, although there is little evidence of maintenance taking place.

33 and 35 Kitchener Road

The two timber, fibro and tile residences at 33 and 35 Kitchener Road date from c. the 1970s and are standard State Housing Commission house types of this period.

In general, the houses are built on stumps and have a timber dado with cladding above and a tile roof. To the front elevation there is slightly projecting bay with a porch to one side. Windows and doors are timber framed.

Although standard plans for the houses at 33 and 35 Kitchener Road have yet to be located, the buildings are very similar in materials, style and layout to the State Housing Commission's Timber Framed Plan No. T3/47A. This plan shows the porch leading to a small internal hall. The living room is off the main hall and from this is the dining room. The place also comprises three bedrooms and a kitchen, laundry and bathroom and toilet at the rear of the house. The dining room is also connected to the kitchen.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

The brick dwellings in *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* are based on the standard station master's house plan of c.1900. The design resulted in a residence of Federation-period Vernacular style. Other examples of the type can be found at Cranbrook (1902), now occupied as the Cranbrook Museum, and Darkan (1913) and Bowelling (1919), both privately tenanted.

The Station Master's House at Wagin (1902) is a timber construction but otherwise conforms to the standard design. It is privately tenanted.⁴⁹

The brick dwellings that constitute part of *Railway Housing Precinct, Merredin* are the only known constructions of their type built for waged railway employees. From the 1920s, all residences constructed for WAGR were of timber or timber-framed construction. The only comparison could be the two-room stone plate-layer's cottages constructed on some of the goldfield lines in the 1890s., and which convinced WAGR decision-makers that less substantial buildings should be provided in future.

The timber and tile Improved Mill type and timber and asbestos Henry Martin type houses are typical of the cheaper housing constructed in the post World War Two building boom. They are similar to many of the residences constructed by the State Housing Commission during this period.

The Improved Mill type has some characteristics of Inter-war Californian Bungalow style, being originally designed in the 1930s. The Henry Martin type, so called because they were constructed by builder Henry Martin & Co, displays no particular style characteristics. The cultural value of these residences lies in their en-masse situation in the railway housing precinct at Merredin.

Some other extant examples of Improved Mill houses are Stickland Street, Wongan Hills (6 houses), 5 and 46 Wittenoom Street and 2 and 4 Chapple Street, Kalgoorlie; 81 Endersbee Street, Merredin; and 3 and 5 Ventnor Street, Wagin. Henry Martin houses were built at Merredin (14), Katanning, Brunswick Junction (6) and Kalgoorlie (8).⁵⁰

13.4 REFERENCES

WAGR Property files for the places, Properties section, WAGR headquarters, East Perth.

WAGR file, Merredin houses for employees, Part 1 & 2, 1966-1976, SRO WAS 1208 CONS 4780 Item R4951.

WAGR file, Merredin departmental houses, Part 1 & 2, SRO, AN262/1 ACC 1240 Item 1987/38.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

⁴⁹ Assessment of Wagin & Cranbrook Station Master's houses for WAGR, 2001; Gray, Laura & Sauman, Irene, *Darkan Railway Precinct, Conservation plan & Bowelling Railway Station, Conservation Plan*, May 2002.

⁵⁰ Contracts no. 431, 433, 436 & 437, WAGR, Alphabetical Index to Contracts, 1900-1966, op cit; WAGR CCE Plan 38084/2, 26 July 1949.