



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 place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is significant for the fine articulation of the Interwar Chicagoesque facades facing Murray Street and Milligan Street. The aesthetic impact is greatly reduced by the charcoal colouring of all materials of which the facades are composed, however, the balance between the projecting vertical members and the horizontal bands and the further refinement of the window glazing squares and circles can, with patience, be appreciated. (Criterion 1.1)

The place is significant for its contribution to the streetscape in its prominent place at the intersection of Murray and Milligan Streets, with the rounded facade above the main entrance hinging the two facades and complementing the intersection of the streets. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The place is associated with the W.D. & H.O. Wills cigarette company and with the tobacco industry in Western Australia from 1927 to the 1960s. (Criterion 2.2 & 2.3)

W.D. & H.O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is a significant example of the work of prominent Western Australian architectural firm Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown. (Criterion 2.3)

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is an example of a late 1920s building specifically designed and constructed to suit space requirements of the company. (Criterion 2.4)

W.D. & H.O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is significant for its innovative structural design and because it was one of two buildings in Perth to be configured with suspended concrete floor slabs. (Criterion 2.4)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) was one of two buildings in Perth to utilise suspended concrete floor slabs and 'mushroom column' designs which eliminated the need for beams. (Criterion 3.3)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Since its construction in 1927, *W.D. & H.O. Wills Warehouse (fmr)* has been a prominent, familiar landmark in the Perth streetscape and, as such, contributes to the wider community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is rare in Western Australia for its early use of reinforced concrete and 'mushroom column' design which eliminated the need for beams. (Criterion 5.2)

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is rare as one of very few extant buildings displaying the full inventory of the Interwar Chicagoesque Style in Perth.

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

W. D. & H. O Wills Warehouse (fmr) is a representative example of the now rare Interwar Chicagoesque style in Perth. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

The condition of the place is poor with signs of neglect internally and externally. The street facades are painted in an unsympathetic colour and there are untidy stickers and signs at street level. The window glass, which is painted over, is broken in places. Internally there is an accumulation of grime, graffiti and junk. Bits of the ceilings are missing and there is water damage to the top floor. The building has been deserted for a long time except for itinerant habitation, which is cause for concerns about security as damage has been caused by vandals.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The place has a low to moderate degree of integrity. Although the building is not currently in use, its interior spaces and size is a reflection of its past use as a warehouse building.

Restoration is possible as much of the original fabric is still intact but much work would be required to redress the abuses of the past.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity is considered moderate to high, as the original materials, while having been covered with inappropriate paint and having sustained a deal of damage, are still largely intact.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The supporting evidence has been prepared by consultants from the Centre for Western Australian History. The documentary evidence has been compiled by Chantal Gurney-Pringle, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Pidgeon, Architect.

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is a representative example of Interwar Chicagoesque architecture. The warehouse was designed by architects Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown, and constructed by the contractor C. Ross in

1927.¹ The warehouse is a three-storey reinforced concrete, brick and steel structure situated in the north-west corner of Murray and Milligan Streets, Perth.

Perth Town Lot V38 was originally owned by Annie Elise Poncy McNess in 1912.² Evidence obtained from the Certificate of Title and Perth Rate Books suggests that the land located on the corners of Murray and Milligan Streets, Perth remained vacant until McNess sold to W. D. & H. O. Wills (Australia) Ltd. in 1922.³ The premises currently located on this site are those built for Wills Australia by Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown.⁴ The warehouse built by Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown remained the operations base for Wills Australia until 1967 when the property was sold to Robert Frederick Hatfield and Robert Geoffrey Stanley as tenants in common.⁵

The W. D. & H. O. Wills (Australia) Ltd. company name was first registered for use as a trading name in Australia in July 1901. The decision to expand into the Australian market by the Wills Company (UK) followed four years after the beginning of negotiations between W. D. & H. O. Wills in the United Kingdom and Todman & Co., Australia who were Wills' Australian distributors.⁶

The Wills name was well known in the United Kingdom and in Empire exports markets such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa by the late 1880s. The first W. D. Wills had been manufacturing tobacco and cigarettes in United Kingdom under various company names since 1786. By 1860, the Wills brand was carried throughout the whole of the United Kingdom under various agents.⁷ It was not however, until the late 1880s, that the benefits of export markets and company expansion were realised.

Wills brand goods became so well known for both quality and competitiveness that during the 1850s-60s, inquiries eventually came from general export merchants in London and Liverpool. In response to the request, the partners of W. D. & H. O. Wills decided to produce separate prices for products prepared especially for export.⁸

Exporting tobacco products required research into the quality of goods after they reached the intended destination and changes to general packaging requirements where necessary. One such innovation was the introduction of tobacco tins. The tobacco tin was a revolutionary invention within the industry as it allowed for the safe transport of loose-leaf tobacco over long distances. Loose-leaf tobacco kept sufficiently moist for trade by agents in the United Kingdom but trade to export markets such as Australia was not viable until the introduction of the tobacco tin.

Wills & Co. continued to conduct business under the agency system of export trade until 1899. At that point, Mr G. F. Todman of Todman & Co. Australia, Wills' agent in Australia, inquired of the parent company whether

1 *Building & Construction*, Vol 1, No. 3, Thursday 2 June 1927, p.6. See plan attached.

2 Certificate of Title, Perth Town Lot V38, 18/09/1912.

3 *ibid.*; Perth Rate Books, Central Ward 1899-1912.

4 Certificate of Title, Perth Town Lot V38, 18/09/1912.

5 *ibid.*

6 Alford, B. W. *W. D. & H. O. Wills and the development of the U.K. tobacco industry 1786 – 1965* Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1973, pp.165, 219-20

7 *ibid.*, p. 123

8 *ibid.*

in view of Federation and the popularity of the American Tobacco Company's brand and of Odgend's colonial-made goods, Wills would consider joining a powerful association of Australian plug-tobacco manufacturers of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.⁹

In June 1900 the Wills board met to discuss Todman's request. Todman argued that 3.3 million Australians bought only £100,000 worth of Wills product, yet their tobacco consumption per annum was one of the highest in the world. After discussion Wills decided to proceed with Todman's request and established a new company capitalised at £250,000. The company, known as W. D. & H. O. Wills (Australia) Ltd, was eventually registered in July 1901. The first directors of the company were H. H. Wills in England, and G. F. Todman and A. J. Warry in Australia.¹⁰ The formation of an Australian firm demonstrated Wills & Co. determination to enter in direct competition to Wills' most formidable international competitor, the American Tobacco Company.¹¹ From these beginnings, the Australian company slowly expanded its markets within all Australian states, beginning with the eastern states and coming later to the West.

In 1927, Wills (Australia) Ltd. built its new premises on the corner of Murray and Milligan Streets in Perth.¹² The building of the new premises, custom designed for the company's needs and comprising a large scale warehouse and office space. An article in the *Building and Construction Journal* alluded to the building's innovative architectural and social features:

[t]his building, when completed will be of three storeys, and constructed of brick and re-inforced cement. Every convenience for the staff's requirements are being catered for, including lunch rooms, cloak rooms, etc., etc. Provision is also being made for the garaging of the firm's cars and the installation of bulk petrol and oils.¹³

The building, designed by local firm Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown, showcased a number of new developments in structural techniques and material technology. Oldham, Boas & Ednie-Brown were a particularly active and progressive firm of Western Australian architects. This approach is evident in the design, scope, function and materials used in the construction of the Murray Street building. The use of reinforced concrete and steel in the warehouses' office spaces saved unnecessary building height by the use of 'mushroom' columns below a reinforced concrete slab. Beams were eliminated by broadening the tops of the columns and merging them into the undersides of the floor slabs.¹⁴ These aspects of design were progressive not only in aesthetic appearance, but also in the method of construction. The *W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr)* was one of the first two buildings in Western Australia to be designed with a suspended concrete floor slab.¹⁵ The first, Winterbottom's Garage, has since been demolished.

Wills Australia used the warehouse premises primarily for packaging and distribution. The basement level was used as garage storage for the firm's sales representatives' vehicles and for refueling. The warehouse also housed the administrative operations for the company's Western Australian market.

9 *ibid.* p. 219

10 *ibid.* p. 220

11 *ibid.* p. 123

12 City of Perth Rate Book, Central Ward, 1926-27, confirm W. D. & H. O. Wills are the rateable owner of the Murray Street address.

13 *Building & Construction* *op. cit.* p. 6.

14 Pitt-Morrison, M. & White, J. (ed) *Western Towns and Buildings* (U.W.A. Press. 1979) pp.125-26.

15 *ibid.*

The central location of the warehouse made it ideal for distributing merchandise to both agents and sales representatives.

The company considered the move to new premises an economically viable move in view of the company's prosperity but it was made at a time of increasingly harsh economic conditions. Wills Australia had found Western Australia a harder market to infiltrate than the rest of Australia. In New South Wales and Victoria, where the company was longer-established, Wills Australia survived harsh economic times but the later entry of Wills into the Western Australian tobacco industry in the late 1910s and early 1920s, meant the company had endeavoured to establish itself at a time of heightening economic and social difficulties. During the 1920s and 1930s, Western Australia's economy experienced a major downturn. The longer-term effects of World War I were enormous, both economically and socially. The Australian economy had slowed during the 1914-18 period and much of Western Australia's primary and secondary industry stagnated due largely to lack of essential supplies and decreased labour markets.¹⁶ Western Australia also suffered severe falls in production and decreased economic growth as a result of the World Wide stock market crash and ensuing Depression.¹⁷ The company survived, but its impact on the Western Australian economy over the depression years and in the post war period has left little trace in the record books, which suggest their influence was not particularly significant over this period.

In 1958 the warehouse was transferred to W. D. & H. O. Wills (Australia) Ltd. in Victoria.¹⁸ This suggests that the Western Australian division of Wills Australia no longer ran its own administrative operations from the Murray Street premises and that the company had a centralised system Australia wide. It is probable that the warehouse was used for distribution throughout Western Australia until it was sold in 1967.

Since 1967 the warehouse has remained largely unoccupied. Occasionally the building has been used and leased to various concerns for general storage space. The building was sold once more in 1968 to William Robert Alexander Wyllie, Managing Director of Wallace Harper & Co. Ltd.¹⁹ In 1976 Australasian Shopping Centres Pty. Ltd. and Purdex Nominees Pty. Ltd. purchased the premises. Since the 1980s numerous holding companies have owned the building and at times have leased the warehouse. One lease agreement, which has impacted on the current condition of the warehouse, was Lada Motors. Lada Motors used the space and adjacent buildings as a showroom and storage area for its range of vehicles.²⁰ There are other suggestions, not confirmed by documentation but visible in the form of physical evidence, that the building was also used at some stage as an entertainment venue, possibly a night club.

Beverly Investment Pty. Ltd. purchased the building in 1984.²¹ Beverly Investments leased out the space as a car storage area and also as a music shop. During this period Beverly Investments hired a caretaker who resided on the top floor of the building.²²

16 Stannage, C. T. *The People of Perth* (Perth City Council, Perth, 1979)pp.237-53.

17 *ibid.*

18 Certificate of Title, Perth Town Lot V38, 18/09/1912.

19 Certificate of Title, Perth Town Lot V38, 18/09/1912.

20 City of Perth Files, 464 Murray Street, Perth, 1980-1999.

21 Certificate of Title, Perth Town Lot V38, 22/08/1980.

22 City of Perth File, 464 Murray Street, Perth, op. cit.

The building has recently been sold and is currently the subject of a development application. In mid-1999, the premises are vacant.²³

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr) is a three storey reinforced concrete framed building standing on the north west corner of Murray and Milligan Street. It is built in the Interwar Chicagoesque style.

Running west from the facade and stepping down the slope of Murray Street are the generally cream coloured facades of four Inter-War warehouse buildings. North down the slope of Milligan Street is the recently built Orchard Hotel complex.

On the south-east corner of the intersection across from the place is a multi-storeyed Post Modern apartment hotel. On the south-west corner of the intersection is the two storey Federation Milligan Hotel, in somewhat run down condition, and west of that is the bland facade of the QVI office building car park. On the north-east corner is a single storey food outlet and east along Murray Street is further low rise development.

Identical, parapet-topped facades facing Murray Street and Milligan Street are hinged about a quarter circle at the truncation of the intersection. This curved part of the facade contains the main entrance and rises up through the three floor levels to finish with a parapet higher than the flanking parapets. The whole of the facades, including the window glass and all other materials are painted a uniform colour.

The entrance, facing diagonally out to the centre of the street intersection, nestles under a circular hood of masonry supported on moulded brackets reflecting the shape of the wall at the street truncation. The doors are timber framed in two leaves with iron mesh backed with unpainted plywood in the once glazed upper panels. The door opening is dressed with rendered architraves of a geometric design of ribs and squares above a plain rendered plinth.

Above the entrance hood is a recessed rendered panel, at first floor level, and at second floor level three tall and narrow double hung windows with fanlights over. Above this is a cornice surmounted with another recessed panel forming the raised parapet.

The facades facing the streets are each divided into four bays by projecting vertical fin-like columns, rising through the height of the facades and over running the height of the parapets. Recessed from the fins-like columns are rendered horizontal spandrels at the floor/ceiling levels and over the top floor ceiling level is a cornice, continuous with that under the parapet of the curved facade at the street truncation. On the face of the columns at the level of the cornice are embossed rectangular motifs.

The bays are of equal widths, but for the two bays flanking the entrance curve, which are narrower and where the tall narrow double hung windows are repeated.

The wider bays contain two banks of windows above the spandrels. Each bank has three double hung windows with a fanlight over. The top sashes of each double hung window and the fanlights over are divided by glazing bars into nine square panes. The centre squares are larger. The centre pane of the fanlights has a circular motifs described by a shaped glazing bar.

²³ *ibid.*

At the north end of the Milligan Street facade, a parapet wall masks a two storey extension, running the length of and cantilevered from the north face of *W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr)* over an undercroft. Further to the north is a wall containing a pedestrian gate and further north still and reaching to the boundary is a rendered masonry door opening containing a traffic roller door allowing access to the rear yard.

The ground floor windows are protected with wrought iron grilles of square vertical sections scrolled at the top and twisted at third points in the height.

The north elevation facing the rear courtyard consists of rendered brick work and windows placed in a random fashion. At first floor level is a flat roofed 3.6 metre wide block running the length of the north elevation and suspended over a ground floor undercroft by means of tapered concrete beams cantilevered from the concrete column and floor construction of the main structure. At the roof level of this block is concrete slab incorporating a further beam reinforced with an angled concrete tie beam and no doubt connected to the tapered beam below with concrete columns to form an unusual cantilevered frame. The western part of this block has a trafficable deck with a steel pipe and mesh balustrade at second floor level. As the ceiling height of this block is a metre lower than that of the adjacent first floor of the main part of the building the deck at second floor level is supported on timber framing built up from the cantilevered frame below. A rusting steel staircase descends from this level to the ground in a series of flights and landings. From the second floor deck the top members of the cantilevered concrete frame may be seen with the concrete roof slab holding water.

Above second floor level in about the centre of the north elevation protrudes the flat roofed lift overrun with a large circular water tank perched on top.

The interior spaces are generally open with the circular mushroom-topped columns common to each level. The paintwork is of dark colours sometimes gaudy primary colours and, the windows being all painted over, the visibility is zero in most parts.

The main staircase is at the entrance in the south-west corner of the building. The staircase has a decorative iron balustrade with a timber handrail. There are some offices partitioned off along the Murray Street (south) side of the building. The lift well with a secondary stair wrapping around it is at the centre of the building against the northern wall. The lift cage is contained in a framed shaft clad with wire mesh.

The ground floor has a ceiling height of 3.0 metres and at the southern side, bordering Murray Street, is below ground level so that there is no access from the main staircase. Access to the ground floor is from a door under the undercroft at the north side or by descending the staircase wrapping around the lift.

In the north-west corner are two partitioned offices. At the south-west corner is the brick wall containing the front staircase which, entering at a higher level, has no access to the ground floor.

The first floor has a ceiling height of 4.1 metres. The circular column mushroom capitals are decorated with embossed foliage and projecting mouldings. At the north-west corner is a concrete ramp presumably for skateboard riders. This rises to a height of about 1.5 metres above floor and occupies two bays by one bay. The ramp continues in a narrower form along the west perimeter wall and returns along the south wall to butt into the stair compartment at the south-west corner of the building.

At this level is the cantilevered toilet block with ceramic tiled walls and granolithic floors. The urinals have been removed and most of the WC pans are broken. Toilets at the west end of the block are entered from the lift lobby where there is an open area also giving access to the outside steel stair. Toilets at the east end are entered from the main area east of the lift well.

At the second floor level, north of the lift well and enwrapping stairs, is a separate narrow stairway leading up to the lift overrun room. South of the stair lobby are brick partitions enclosing various empty areas. A corridor leads south from the stair lobby with an open area between it and the west perimeter wall and a former bar area on the eastern side. Near the south perimeter wall, the corridor turns east leaving a well lighted room to the south and opening onto the front staircase. The bar area has brick bar fronts along the north and east side. The counter tops and all other parts of the bars have been stripped. To the north of the bar are the remnants of an office and toilets. There is also a small toilet leading off the lift lobby to the west.

The lift overrun room is about 7 metres by 6 metres and contains the remnants of an electric lift motor. It also gives access to the main roof space which shows timber framing built up from a concrete slab and supporting a low pitched corrugated iron cladding.

The general presentation is one of neglect. There are reminders of days when the building may well have served as an entertainment venue (although there is no documentary evidence of this) with gaudy colour schemes and decorations. There are numerous crates of motor car parts from the days of Lada Motors. There is copious dirt and grime. The toilet areas are wrecked with broken vitreous china fittings and graffiti applied to the walls. Areas of the floor covering such as ceramic tiles and wood block flooring have been partially taken up and the debris left in heaps. Patches of the soffit of the slabs over the main staircase and the undercroft at the north side of the building have the steel reinforcing bars exposed by the breaking away of the concrete cover.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Buildings of similar architectural style are: the R. M. Smythe Building (old ES&A Bank on the corner of Milligan Street and Hay Street), (1928) Architect Oldham Boas and Ednie Brown; *Newspaper House*, 125 -131 St Georges Terrace Perth (1930-32) Architects Hobbs Smith and Forbes; and Wellington Building 515 Wellington Street (corner of William Street) Architect R. J. Dennehy. While not warehouse buildings these were of the Interwar Chicagoesque Style, having the grid like facades suggesting a framed structure, the strong cornice, the vertical structural members treated as pilasters (the fin-like columns described above), and three light windows and spandrels expressing storey divisions. The grid-like pattern of the facade is shared with some Art Deco buildings such as the Gledon Building, corner of William Street and Hay Street Perth, but other than in *W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr)*, the full inventory of the Chicagoesque Style is rarely seen in the surviving building stock.

13.4 REFERENCES

Alford, B. W. *W. D. & H. O. Wills and the development of the U.K. tobacco industry 1786 – 1965*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1973.

Building & Construction Vol 1, No. 3, Thursday 2 June 1927, p. 6.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

No photographic evidence has been found with the exception of *Building & Construction Journal* Vol 1, No. 3 (Thursday 2 June 1927), p. 6. However, this journal is located in the Batty Library rare book collection and no copying of this photograph is permitted. The photograph shows *W. D. & H. O. Wills Warehouse (fmr)* under construction in 1927.