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[*]

Merredin Town Hall has aesthetic value as a fine example of the Inter-war Free Classical style. (Criterion 1.1)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is a landmark in Merredin as the clock tower is visible from many positions around Merredin town. (Criterion 1.3)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is highly valued by the community of Merredin and districts, for its contribution to the character of the town where, with the nearby Merredin Court House, it forms a civic streetscape. (Criterion 1.4)

11. 2.   HISTORIC VALUE

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is indicative of the growing prosperity of the Merredin township and surrounding wheatbelt district in the 1920s. (Criterion 2.2)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) was associated with the Road Board, and local Government in Merredin, from 1925 to 1961.   The place continues its Government connections in 1998 as the electorate office of the Deputy Premier of Western Australia, MLA Hendy Cowan. (Criterion 2.3)

The clock in *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* was erected as a memorial to the local soldiers who died in World War One. The building is a very good example of the work of architect W. G. Pickering.(Criterion 2.3)

The clock workings were designed by J. W. Benson, Queen Victoria's clock maker, and are a small replica of his Big Ben clock in Westminster. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3.   SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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[*]   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

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is valued by the local community for its link to the District Hall, which was a place to meet and socialise, to celebrate and commemorate. (Criterion 4.1)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is valued by the local community as the site of the Road Board office and the centre of local Government from 1925 to 1961. (Criterion 4.1)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) contributes to the community's sense of place and is dominant in the townscape. (Criterion 4.2)

12.   DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is one of a few roads board buildings with a clock tower in Western Australia. Others include Menzies, which has a tower, but not a clock, and Midland, where the clock tower was added to the Council Chambers as a memorial to enlisted men who served during World War One. (Criterion 5.1)

The clock in *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* is one of four clocks erected in Western Australia as memorials to servicemen and women. The others are Denmark (1920s), Subiaco (1922/3) and Midland (1923). (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2   REPRESENTATIVENESS

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is a fine example of a rural civic administration building constructed in the 1920s in the wheatbelt. It is a very good example of the work of architect W. G. Pickering. (Criterion 6.1)

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is representative of functional memorials erected in the Inter-War years in Western Australia to commemorate enlisted servicemen from the local district. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3   CONDITION

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is in good condition, largely due to the restoration work carried out by the Building Management Authority c. 1993.

12. 4   INTEGRITY

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) has retained a high degree of integrity.

12. 5   AUTHENTICITY

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) was originally an addition to the Merredin District Hall, and is now the only part remaining. It has undergone minimal alterations to the original fabric - primarily the replacement of the entry doors, and the addition of toilet facilities. The place has retained a 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, Architect.

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is a single-storey brick and tile building, with a three-storey clock tower, constructed in the Inter-War Free Classical style.[1] The place was constructed in 1925, as an addition to the front of the Merredin District Hall (1912). The Hall was demolished c. 1975.

The Merredin district was settled from the 1880s, when sandalwood cutters began working the area and pastoralists began to take up leases.[2] With the discovery of gold in the Southern Cross and Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie areas in the 1890s, transport between Perth and the goldfields was required. The Eastern Railway, which had been constructed as far as Northam in 1886, was extended to Southern Cross in 1894, Coolgardie in 1895 and reached Kalgoorlie in 1897. The Northam-Kalgoorlie section was known as the Eastern Goldfields Railway.[3]

The siding at Merredin 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. The Merredin townsite was surveyed in 1904.[4] Situated about halfway between Perth and Kalgoorlie, Merredin was the ideal site for coal and locomotive depots on the Eastern Goldfields line. The opening of the railway loop line to Dowerin in 1911, the Bruce Rock-Quairading-York line in 1913, the Bruce Rock-Corrigin-Narrogin line in 1914, and the Narrogin-Narembeen line in 1923, made Merredin a major railway junction.[5] 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.[6]

The Merredin Roads Board was gazetted on 9 June 1911.[7] The District, consisting of an area of 87,058 square miles (2,255,000ha), was made up of portions of districts excised from Kellerberrin, Moora and Yilgarn Road Boards. Rateable value in 1912, was £2,210. The first meeting of the Merredin Roads Board was held in Armstrong's Hall on 26 August 1911.

Armstrong's Hall was the dining room of the boarding house run by Mrs Elizabeth Armstrong, and was used as a venue for social gatherings and meetings. After the first Roads Board meeting, a brick building in Hines Hill was rented and furnished with a '9x4 foot table and 12 chairs'. Board

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[1]   Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present,* Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1994, pp. 154-157.

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

[3]   *West Australian Yearbook,* Perth, 1894, p. 78.

[4]   Ewers, John K. op cit, pp. 10-13.

[5]   Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff, *Rails Through the Bush,* Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 206-208.

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

[7]   *Western Australian Government Gazette,* 9 June 1911, p. 1916.

meetings were held on the Saturday 'which preceded the full moon' so there would be some light for Board members driving home in a horse and buggy to remote parts of the District.[8] However, Merredin residents were not happy with Hines Hill as the centre of administration. The Merredin Progress Association protested to the Minister for Works and, in April 1912, Roads Board headquarters moved to Merredin.

Merredin needed both a community hall and offices for the Roads Board. Town Lots 120 and 121, on Mitchell Street, were selected as a suitable site and subsequently gazetted Reserve 13941, 'Road Board Office & Hall Site.'[9] On 6 July 1912, advice was received of a Government Grant of £50 toward the provision of a hall. A grand design was envisaged and tenders were called for the building on 27 July. They ranged in price from £2,920 to £3,660, and were far more than the district could afford to finance from revenue and grants. The Board decided to float a loan of £2,500, with debentures to be sold at £25 each and carrying interest at $5^1/_2$%. There was no response to the float. An attempt to have the loan underwritten at a brokerage of $2^1/_2$% met with the same negative response.[10]

The only alternative was to build a more modest hall. A building of timber and iron, measuring 60x40 feet (18.3m x 12.2m) with a lean-to at the back for the Board's offices, was constructed. The building was sited on Lot 121.[11] Materials were supplied by Bunning Bros at a cost of £360, including rail freight. F. C. Moss constructed the hall for £85. Even these amounts proved difficult for the Road Board to pay.[12] Merredin District Hall was opened on 23 April 1913, with a Grand Ball and Banquet, attended by Acting Premier, Thomas Bath, and B. J. Stubbs, MLA for the Avon district.

The period 1920 to 1930, was one of expansion for the wheatbelt districts, encouraged by Government policies on land settlement, and higher wheat prices.[13] A new railway branch line through Narembeen to Merredin was also under construction. Roads Board Chairman, Gerald Woolgar, believed it was time to improve the District Hall and build more substantial Roads Board offices.[14]

The Roads Board negotiated a loan of £5,000, later to be extended to £7,000, for the construction of brick offices in front of the Hall, and for improvements to the Hall itself. Included in the 1924/25 work were alterations to the District Hall. The ceiling and roof of the Hall was raised six feet, and buttresses added to the side walls to carry the extra weight. The lean-to offices at the rear were removed and the stage, a kitchen and cloak rooms were added in their place.[15]

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[8]   Law, F. A. *The History of Merredin,* Merredin Road Board, Perth, 1961, pp. 36. This local history is written by a former member of the Merredin Road Board and was compiled using Road Board records.
[9]   ibid., pp. 76-82; Site plan, HCWA File 1576.
[10]   Law, F. A. op cit.
[11]   Physical evidence.
[12]   Law, F. A. op cit.
[13]   Stannage, C. T. op cit, p. 250.
[14]   Law, F. A. op cit.
[15]   ibid,

The new building comprised a clock tower with a single-storey section on each side containing offices and Board Room. *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* was designed by architect George Pickering and built by local builder, James R. Parker. The foundation stone was laid by Gerald Woolgar, on 16 November 1924.[16] The place was officially opened 20 May 1925, by Harry Craven Griffiths, MLA for Avon. The day featured a public tea, a musical and dramatic programme, and 'grand Dance'.[17]

The new building, and the clock tower in particular, was erected in memory of the servicemen of the Merredin district who had died in World War One. Many memorials have been erected in Australia following major wars to honour and remember the sacrifice of those who served and are important for their community associations, as well as the values and sentiments they represent.[18] Memorials erected following World War One were central to a sense of national identity and expressed Australia's allegiance to and pride in being part of the Imperial British Empire and were often derived from ancient classical memorial traditions.[19]

Memorials took many forms and were generally monumental, in the form of a sculpture, cenotaph, honour board, obelisk, soldier statue or wall, or were practical, in the form of ornamental clocks, flag poles, sundials, seats, buildings, plantings or other recreational or community sites.[20] Unlike the eastern states, many memorials constructed in Western Australia in the inter-war years were buildings rather than monuments or ornaments, as many rural areas at the time were underdeveloped and generally lacking in community amenities.[21]

Merredin Town Hall (fmr), a community building in the Inter-War Free Classical style fits into this pattern. The clock has identical workings to 'Big Ben' in Westminster, London. Engraved on the mechanism is the legend 'J. W. Benson, Ludgate Hill, London, Clockmaker to the Queen and the Prince of Wales'.[22] A commemorative stone marking the erection of the clock as a memorial was unveiled on Anzac Day, 1928.[23]

> The clock in this tower was erected by the residents of the district in memory of the soldiers who laid down their lives in the Great War 1914-1918. This tablet was unveiled by Brigadier-General A. J. Bessell-Browne CB CMG DSO VD (F) on 25th April 1928.[24]

In 1944, two additional offices for the Roads Board were added along the east wall of the Hall, at a cost of £1,000. In 1958, another £1,000 was spent remodelling the western wall with new doors and windows. The District Hall hosted movies, dances, balls, church services, weddings, amateur dramatics, conferences and meetings.[25]

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[16]   ibid.; foundation stone inscription obtained from physical evidence.
[17]   Law, F. A. op. cit.; photograph 20 May 1925.
[18]   Richards, Oline, 'War Memorials in Western Australia', Perth, 1996, p. 1.
[19]   ibid., p. 4.
[20]   ibid., pp. 8-9.
[21]   ibid., pp. 5.
[22]   Law, F. A. op. cit.; *Daily News*, 9 March 1988, p. 14.
[23]   *Merredin Mercury* 26 April 1928, p. 2.
[24]   Plaque inscription obtained from physical evidence.
[25]   Photograph c. 1940s. The photograph of the exterior of the place shows railing around a concrete shield set on the footpath in front of the plaque dedicating the clock. Photographs

In 1961, the Roads Board became the Shire Council and moved into new offices on the corner of Barrack and Queen streets. The Hall was demolished c. 1975, leaving *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* standing. A toilet block was added at the rear following the demolition of the hall.[26] The place was taken over by the local RSL as their clubrooms, but the building was in need of maintenance and repair.[27] In 1985, Merredin Shire commissioned Kevin Palassis to prepare a report on restoration of the place.[28]

In the early 1990s, the Shire let the place as a doctor's surgery. Circa 1993, the place was refurbished by the Building Management Authority for use by Hendy Cowan, MLA as his electorate office. Merredin RSL still hold their meetings in the place. A Bicentennial Plaque has been fixed near the entrance. The clock is still in working order.[29]

13. 2   PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is situated on Lots 120 and 121 in Mitchell Street Merredin. The place is the former Merredin Road Board office and Board Room. The District Hall, which adjoined the rear of the place, was demolished c. 1975.

The building makes a significant contribution to the streetscape and townscape of Merredin, and is a landmark in the town. It is situated in close proximity to the Court House, with which it forms a civic streetscape.

The building is situated on the front street boundary of the property. Three sides of the building surrounds are brick paved, and the east side is natural earth. As indicated on the site plan, curtilage should extend along the front (south) boundary, to the 20.12 metre extent of the boundary of the former Lot 121 within the reserve. It is recommended that the depth of the curtilage is 10.00 metres north from the front boundary.

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) displays characteristics of the Inter-war Free Classical style.[30] The characteristics of the style appropriate to this place include: the conservative expression of community values, scale appropriate to a public building, freestanding, symmetry, modelled and textured facade, pedimented entrance, prominent central tower with classical motifs, and the fact that it is a civic building. The construction of the place is typical of the period, with traditional brick load bearing walls and timber floor and roof construction.

The single-storey building with central three-storey clock tower, is a face brick construction with rendered quoins. The place is symmetrical and regular in plan. The roof is a gambrel hipped roof with exposed and overhung eaves. It

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taken in 1998 (see physical evidence) show the remains of the railing attached to the facade of the place and the concrete shield fixed to the building beneath the plaque. The inscription on the shield is not legible, and John Rutherford of Merredin Historical Society, could offer no explanation for the shield's presence.

[26]   Law, F. A. op cit.

[27]   Telephone conversation with Lynton Thomas by Irene Sauman, 4 August 1998, Memo HCWA File 1576.

[28]   Palassis, Kevin, 'Report on the restoration of the Merredin District Hall for the Shire of Merredin,' April 1985.

[29]   Telephone conversation with Lynton Thomas, op cit.

[30]   Apperly, R., op. cit.,. pp. 154-157.

has a high pitch at approximately 35 degrees, and is clad with 'Marseille' clay tiles, featuring a decorative ridge. The tower roof is hipped with no eaves overhang. The central point has a flagpole, and there is a gabled vent on each of the two sides of the tower roof.

The ground floor frontage is symmetrical about the central entry. The entry has an arched pediment above the date '1925' in relief. The original timber doors have been replaced by aluminium framed glazing and a central, single, aluminium framed glazed entry door. Two sets of three casement windows, with fixed lights above, are set on either side of the central entry. The window sills align with a rendered line which extends across the frontage, defining the dado line on the pilasters and cornice reveals. The corners of the building and the entrance opening have rendered quoins, with incised banding above the dado pilasters. The courses above the window heads are rendered across the entire facade. The entry quoins continue through the tower construction as it rises on that line.

The front facade has a stone plaque on either side, centred beneath the windows. The stone on the west side is the foundation stone laid by Gerald Woolgar. The matching stone on the east side dedicates the clock in the tower to the memory of those who fell during World War One. This stone has miniature pilaster columns embedded in the wall on either side. They are the remains of the railing that can be seen in earlier photographs of the place. A concrete shield is fixed on the wall below the stone plaque. Any engraving on the shield has been eroded away.

The tower is square in plan, all corners are quoined, and the central front of the tower features a rendered panel with serif lettering 'MERREDIN DISTRICT HALL'. The main feature of the clock tower is the round clock face on three facades of the tower (not on north side). The clock face is set within a rendered reveal below a deep rendered cornice line around the top of the tower walls.

The ground floor of *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* comprises a central entry, one room on the west, and two rooms on the east. The entry doors open directly into the reception area. A door on the immediate left (west) opens into the RSL meeting room, and double doors on the right (east) open into the front office, occupied by MLA Hendy Cowan. The second door on the right opens into what is now the kitchen and store room, which are also accessed from the front office. In the rear (north) wall of the reception area, a door on the right leads to the toilet facilities. The double doors on the left lead outside. These doors originally opened into the hall.

The rooms throughout the ground floor are intact. They all have hard plaster walls, pressed metal floral decoration ceilings and original timber detailing, doors, architraves and hardware. The floor in the reception area is concrete and the rest are timber. All floors are carpeted.

The RSL meeting room was formerly the Board Room of the Merredin Road Board. The fireplace and original black lacquered mantelpiece feature in the centre of the west wall. The room houses stairway access to the clock tower. The narrow timber staircase is detailed in varnished timber on the underside, and has a varnished timber cupboard occupying the space beneath. The beginning of the return staircase is situated in the corner of the room, and

features turned newel and balusters. The entire staircase opening, walls and ceiling, is lined in varnished tongue and groove jarrah.

The front office, formerly the Road Board Secretary's office, extends across the eastern end of the south frontage of the building. It features a corner fireplace and light coloured timber mantelpiece. There are two doors on the north wall. The door on the left, nearest the reception area, is original and has a fanlight above. The door on the right is a modern flush panel door. Both doors are set in original architraves.

The right hand door leads into a smaller office, now used as a storeroom. It has a corner fireplace and mantelpiece similar to that in the front office. An air conditioner has been installed in the window (east wall), and the original strong room occupies the north-west corner of the space. A smaller room, between the storeroom and the reception area, has been fitted out as a small kitchen. The kitchen is accessed from the storeroom, the front office and the reception area.   Provision of the kitchen was part of the work done by the BMA c. 1993.

The reception area has an incised dado line around the wall, and two high panels of pressed metal ceiling either side of a low central ceiling section. The low ceiling is supported by a steel beam extending across the area, on the engaged piers.

The clock tower is two stories high from its floor at first-floor level. A timber structure, centrally located in the tower room, supports the clock mechanism. A timber ladder-like staircase gives access to the second-floor level, approximately 2.2 metres above the tower room floor. The second-floor is a walkway around the internal perimeter of the tower walls. It is supported by substantial timber struts of jarrah 152 x 76 mm (6 x 3 inches). The floor boards are all 127 mm (5 inch) tongue and groove jarrah boards. The wall height above the second-floor level is approximately four metres. Extending from the central clock mechanism to each of the three clock faces is a steel rod which operates the clock mechanism on each face. A large steel pendulum swings from the central clock mechanism.

The external rear wall of *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* has been rendered. The toilet addition is a brick construction with a skillion colorbond roof. Two air conditioner units protrude from the rear (north) wall of the RSL meeting room. A small gable extends from the rear of the main building roof, and appears to come from the vicinity of the supported low ceiling space in reception. The reason for, and function of this space is not known.

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) has undergone minimal interference to the fabric except for the addition of toilet facilities, and the installation of aluminium framed entrance doors c. 1993. The building is in very good condition owing to the restoration work carried out by the BMA c. 1993. The only element showing signs of weathering are the timber window frames on the west face. The place has retained a high degree of integrity and authenticity.

Merredin Town Hall (fmr) is thought to be the only Road Board building in the wheatbelt region with a working clock tower. The Menzies Roads Board Office (1901) has a clock tower with the capacity for four clock faces, but no workings or faces due to lack of funds.

There are four other known clock memorials in Western Australia commemorating returned servicemen and women. These are: Denmark (1920s and substantially modified after World War Two), a feature wall with a large clock face, plaster bas relief of a female figure and four marble tablets inscribed with the names of those who died in World War One and World War Two[31]; Melville City Square Clock Tower (1988), a clock tower with a brass plaque dedicated to those who served in all wars[32]; Subiaco War Memorial (1922/3), a large brick clock tower with Donnybrook stone facings on a Meckering granite base, with copper clad roof spire, a four faced clock and marbled tablets at the base inscribed with the names of those who died in World War One and World War Two[33]; and, Midland War Memorial (1923), a clock tower on the Midland Council Chambers which is a well known landmark.[34]

Architect W. G. Pickering also designed many other buildings in the wheatbelt area including the Wyalkatchem Hotel (1919), Lake Grace Hotel (1924), the Bruce Rock Co-op shops (c. 1929) and the Wongan Hills Hospital (1930). All are extant. *Merredin Town Hall (fmr)* is the most innovative design of all these works.

13. 3 REFERENCES

Palassis, Kevin, 'Report on the restoration of the Merredin District Hall for the Shire of Merredin,' April 1985.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

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[31] Richards, op. cit.; p. 46.
[32] ibid., p. 75.
[33] ibid., p. 110.
[34] ibid., p. 113.