



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 1015
2. **Name.** Fremantle Town Hall (1887)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry.**
Fremantle Town Hall and the lands on which it stands, being Lot 4 on Plan 11, comprised in C/T 59/40.
4. **Local Government Area.** City of Fremantle.
5. **Location.** 8 William Street, Fremantle
6. **Owner.** City of Fremantle
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The Fremantle Town Hall is an impressive two storey stuccoed building built in 1887 to accommodate the administrative and civic functions of the Fremantle Municipal Council.

The Fremantle Municipal Council, formed in 1871 from the Fremantle Town Trust, initially met in a variety of different locations in Fremantle. Having become a municipality, the Council set as a prime objective the procurement of a permanent Town Hall. In 1876, a site on the corner of South Terrace and Essex Street was selected and set aside for Town hall purposes. Governor Robinson gave consent for the setting, together with his approval for the use of convict labour in its construction. He also authorised for plans and specifications to be provided free of charge by the Government, and stone for the building to be provided from the Government quarry. In addition he asked the Legislature to set aside £2,000 as a grant towards the cost of construction.¹

Subsequently, Mr Thomas, the Government Engineer, prepared plans in June 1876 for a two storey building with entrances off both South Terrace and Essex Street. The buildings was to be dominated by a "handsome clock tower". On the upper floor was to be the main hall with a supper room, cloak rooms and a lower

¹ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) a2.4

floor of offices.² Although this plan foundered due to Fremantle Council's financial position, and its desire to find a more central site, the fundamental design principles influenced the later designs. The principal requirements of the later design brief were similar to those of the original South Terrace scheme, apart from the relocation of the auditorium at ground level.

In 1876 the Trustees of St. John's Church offered Fremantle Council part of their site in King's Square, together with a strip of land to enable the extension of High Street. Money to pay for the land was borrowed from the Marine Insurance Company and ownership vested in the Council on 10th January, 1878, although the Council did not take possession of the land until 9th September, 1882.³

In April, 1881, a premium of £50 was offered for the best plans submitted by architects for a new Town Hall and Municipal Chambers.⁴ Plans by R.B. Lucas and Company of Adelaide were accepted and the premium paid. The buildings cost was to have been about £4,000 on the South Terrace site, but the figure was revised up to £10,000 for the King's Square site. The project was ambitious and costly at a time when the population of Fremantle was only 3,641, and would only increase to 20,444 by 1901.⁵ Part of the finance for the project was obtained in 1882, when the South Terrace site was sold, and the Government had previously promised a grant of £2,000 towards the costs, however by 1884, it became apparent finance for the project could not be realised. In the meantime the plans submitted by Lucas and Company were rejected in favour of plans submitted by Melbourne architects Grainger and D'Ebro. Their plans were described as being "far superior to those already accepted by the Council."⁶

Concerned that the Government might withdraw its promised finance, the Council to invite Grainger and D'Ebro to Fremantle to advise upon work that might reasonably be started immediately. Minor modifications to the plans were made, and building tenders called. All tenders exceeded the budget, further modifications were made to the plans, and tenders invited once more. Edward Keane was the only builder to tender; he submitted four separate prices ranging from £6,200 for essential work carried out in stone, stuccoed with cement up to £9,916 for the whole building. The Council resolved to proceed only with a portion of the work, comprising the auditorium, supper room, kitchen and vestibule, at the lower price.⁷

A loan was advertised to raise £1,500 for the Town Hall. At a rate payer's meeting on 4th May, 1884, Fremantle Council was urged to "take the necessary steps

² Ewers, J. *The Western Gateway: A History of Fremantle* (F.Daniels, Perth, 1971) quoted in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.4

³ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985)

⁴ Minutes of Fremantle Town Council, 9th May, 1881.

⁵ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.5

⁶ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.5

⁷ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985)A2.5

to complete the Town Hall building in its entirety in preference to the section at present arranged for."⁸ The Council agreed to raise an additional loan to cover the extra £5,000 required. Loan money was raised by the issue of debentures for a ten year term at six per cent per annum.⁹ A contract was signed with Edward Keane on 28th May, 1885, to complete to work for £9,916. George Foreman, an architect, acted as Clerk of Works. The foundation stone was laid by Governor Broome on 10th September and the ceremony was celebrated with a banquet in the Oddfellows Hall opposite.

The Town Hall was opened on the 22nd June, 1887, to coincide with the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. A grand opening ceremony was held, followed by a day of sport and a grand ball in the evening.¹⁰ On the following evening there was a children's fancy dress ball, which was marred by the murder of Councillor Snook by William Conroy, landlord of the Victoria Hotel. Subsequently, Conroy was hung at Perth Gaol, the last person to do so.¹¹

Fremantle Town Hall soon served the various needs of the people of Fremantle. The Fremantle Telephone Exchange was accommodated in one of the rooms and the Presbyterians rented the supper room of the Town Hall for Church services and Sunday School from December 1887. The Hall, which could accommodate 3,000 people, was the venue for a Grand Ball to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.¹² Press comments at the time stated "the new Town Hall lends very admirably to such festivities, ample space being available and every convenience in the numerous apartment which surround the tessellated open triangle in the centre of the building."¹³ And, "...it is impossible to look around this spacious hall, without feeling it a fitting and striking monument to public zeal of a municipal body, which has to meet many demands from limited resources."¹⁴

The Town Hall also drew favourable comment from interstate visitors. Two years after the opening it was described as "...a beautiful Town Hall..... and for elegance of appearance and extent of convenience is equal to similar buildings in Victoria"¹⁵ The final cost, including the clock, was £10,792. The architects' fees came to £604/18/3.¹⁶ The clock, similar to one installed in Liverpool in the previous year, was installed by William Hooper of Fremantle at a cost of £748/10/0. The chimes were described as "Cambridge chimes", similar to those in a Liverpool clock-tower.¹⁷

⁸ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.5

⁹ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.5

¹⁰ Pictorial Australian Vol 1 (new series) No.9 Sept. 1885 p159

¹¹ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.5

¹² *The Weekly Times* 25 June, 1887

¹³ *The West Australian* 24th June, 1887.

¹⁴ *The Weekly Times* 25 June, 1887

¹⁵ *The Inquirer and Commercial News* 21 August, 1889

¹⁶ Charles A. D'Ebro account dated 25 May, 1887 cited in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A 2.5

¹⁷ Ward, K., *A Fremantle Sketchbook*, p.6.

In 1897 E.J.Clark designed and supervised alterations to the auditorium and added a balcony to the building,¹⁸ however the balcony was removed in 1927. In 1909 the main hall was leased to West's Pictures to show the latest innovation: moving pictures.¹⁹

In the early 1960's the expanding needs and responsibilities of Fremantle Council placed pressure on existing accommodation. As a result a new administration building was commissioned, and built in 1963, to house some of the activities then in the Town Hall. The vacated rooms provided space for the State Electricity Commission in two room on the ground floor level, a cloak room and canteen. Two offices on William Street were converted to public lavatories and doorways cut to permit public access. An exhibition hall was constructed to abut the building at the right of way. The new building diminished the importance of the old Town Hall entrance. On the first floor former Council offices became committee rooms and the Council Chamber was refurbished.²⁰ The building was also painted several times over the years, with the original finishes covered under the layers of paint. This work has now been restored in keeping with the Conservation Plan produced by Considine and Griffiths, in 1985.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The Fremantle Town Hall is a two storey stuccoed brick and stone building in the Victorian Free Classical style, designed by Grainger and D'Ebro.²¹ It is triangular in shape, and sited at the junction of William and High Streets, overlooking St. John's (formerly King's) Square.²² A prominent feature is the 90 feet high clock tower at the apex of the plan.

At the time of the Town Hall's construction, development in the area was sparse. Commercial development was limited to William Street. Four houses were sited on Adelaide Street, between William and Queen Streets, with a warehouse, together with a number of small domestic buildings, in William Street.²³

The walls are load bearing brick and stone, with cement stucco finish externally and plaster internally. Part of the masonry walls were painted, but in 1966 the whole exterior was painted. The subsequent accumulation of paint coatings has obscured the incised coursing lines on the upper storey.

¹⁸ *Western Mail*, 15 July 1898, p.7.

¹⁹ City of Fremantle, NEGP submission 1981/82

²⁰ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan*. (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.11

²¹ Apperley, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp56-59

²² The name of the square was changed in 1984 as part of the redevelopment of Fremantle for the America's Cup.

²³ PWD plan dated 1896 cited in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan*. (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.9

The facades are articulated by a multiplicity of classical elements. These include a rusticated ground floor, Corinthian pilasters, pedimented windows, urns, string course, heavy moulded architraves and swags. All were rendered to appear as stone. A Stucco finish, widely used at the time, was versatile and enabled builders to "...achieve lavish effects without slowing construction time by resorting to expensive, dressed stone walling."²⁴ Some of these decorative elements have since been removed, during subsequent 'improvement' programs. Window frames are timber, and generally double hung sash, although some window frames have been replaced, or remodelled by the removal of the vertical glazing beads. Windows in the clock tower and ante rooms were removed in 1938, and replaced with the extant acid etched fixed planes. Fremantle Town Hall and St John's Square were surrounded by iron railing fences, but these are no longer extant.²⁵

The steep pitched towers and mansard roofs were originally covered with slate, and capped with decorative cast iron finials and balustrades. Decorative finials were also applied to the ridge of the roof over the apartment. The lower pitched roofs were covered in galvanised corrugated iron, which was later replaced with asbestos cement sheeting and then replaced with glazed tiles in 1965. In the late 1930s, the slate roofing was replaced with glazed Marseilles tiles, except for the clock tower which still retains its slate roofing.²⁶

The floors throughout the Town Hall are of timber construction, with timber floor boards, (originally polished), and lathe and plaster soffits. Decorative plaster work has been removed to the large extent, although, apart from the work in the auditorium, it was not elaborate. Roofs are framed in jarrah and in the case of the auditorium are trussed in jarrah to span the width of the hall. Until 1929 the auditorium was top lit by natural light. Artificial lighting was provided by gas mantles and chandeliers, installed by Fremantle Gas and Coke Company for £188/19/1.²⁷ There is some remaining evidence of their design in the first floor, on the William Street side .

The plan of the building remains essentially is as it was at the time of completion, though some minor modifications were made during construction, and there have been minor alterations since. A contemporary description states: "This building, now in the course of erection, is to be triangular in shape, its three facades facing High Street, William Street and a private right of way. The High Street part of the structure has a frontage of 100 feet and is 45 feet high; while that in William Street is 135 feet long and 41 feet high.

"The tower, which is 89 feet high is situated at the corner of the two streets. Under the tower is a portico 12 feet square. Proceeding along the ground floor, we come the entrance hall or gang way. On the William Street side are first, two cloak room, then were enter three commodious offices. Next

²⁴ Apperley, R., Irving, R., Reynolds,P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Roberston, North Ryde, 1989) p 56

²⁵ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.9

²⁶ Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.7; A3.2

²⁷ Quotation from Fremantle Gas and Coke Co. 13 October, 1886 cited in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.8

comes a vestibule leading into the supper room. This latter is a commodious and pretty chamber, its dimensions being 38 feet 9 inches by 19 feet. The last room on the William Street side is the kitchen, the dimensions of which are 19 feet 6 inches by 19 feet. The ground floor on the High Street side contains a clock room, two large offices and the main hall.

"The entrance to the latter is nearly 80 feet up the High Street frontage. The room is 80 feet long, 47 feet 6 inches broad and 32 feet 3 inches high. Along the walls on either side are thirteen massive columns, surmounted by ornamental moulded cups.²⁸ At the bottom of the room stands the stage 33 feet by 19 feet.

"The Hall is to be lighted by burners placed in large domes in the ceiling.²⁹ There are three escape doors on one side, leading onto the gangway, and three leading into the right of way.³⁰ In the centre of the ground floor is a triangular plot, marked in the plans as an open air courtyard. Above, ranging all round, is a very ornamental balcony. From the gangway we ascend a semi-spiral staircase, and find ourselves on the first floor. In the tower above the portico on the ground floor, is the committee room,³¹ then on the William Street side we have an office, the Council Chamber (19 feet 8 inches by 18 feet), an ante room, the public office (26 feet 6 inches by 19 feet 8 inches), the Town Clerk's office, the Mayor's office and the Alderman's room.

"Along the right of way side, the private office and the Treasurer's office (20 feet by 19 feet 8 inches) and the Surveyors office will be found. An outside view shows four large turrets on the William Street wing, two pointed and two square, while in High Street there is one with a pointed spire."³²

In addition, there was second floor accommodation, back of stage accommodation on the upper floors and also a small amount of basement accommodation, under the stage: initially this space was constructed without a floor, however a floor and additional support to the stage were added later.

Modifications to the clock tower were made during construction to raise it by 16 feet so that it could be more easily seen at a distance. Insert panels depicting swans were placed where the original opening for the clock was to be. The clock tower was topped by a steep pitched slate clad spire and capped by a small platform with a cast iron balustrade and flag pole.

The Town Hall had a number of changes in its fabric to cope with increasing use and changing demands, but the basic fabric remained intact. Later additions and alterations to the building are detailed in Section 13 of Considine and Griffiths' *Conservation Analysis and Plan*. Conservation of the Town Hall commenced in 1985, with funds made available by the Commonwealth Government for America's Cup projects. The project was undertaken in conjunction with the redevelopment of King's Square (subsequently called St. John's Square).

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

28 Corinthian capped pilasters.

29 gas lighting as elsewhere in the building

30 Later exits from the balcony were added.

31 This was later used to accommodate the chain drops for the clock

32 Pictorial Australian Vol 1 (new series) No.9 Sept. 1885 p159 quoted in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan*. (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.6. notes to the above also supplied by Considine and Griffiths.

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

The Fremantle Town Hall has aesthetic value as an outstanding example of Victorian Free Classical design, used to symbolise civic dignity and pride. The building demonstrates the eclectic use of diverse decorative classical elements, resulting in a rich visual and textural quality. It also incorporates the use of local fauna, the black swan, into its design, which was unusual at the time.

The Town Hall clock tower is a city landmark, which can be seen from nearly all areas of the city. It literally identifies St. John's Square as the civic centre of Fremantle.

2. HISTORIC VALUE

The Fremantle Town Hall has historic significance as a demonstration of the civic pride and confidence held by the Town Councillors and community in constructing such an impressive building, well in advance of the population of the town and its available resources.

The Town Hall is a Western Australian example of the architectural work of well known Melbourne architects Grainger and D'Ebro.

The Free Classical style, with its mixture of classical and Renaissance references, demonstrates the increasingly sophisticated use of architectural styles amongst Australian architects.³³

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the history of municipal development in Fremantle, and in Western Australia.

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The Town Hall, and St John's Square, is the civic centre of Fremantle. It continues to be an important meeting place for social, civic and cultural events.

The Town Hall has social significance as the place in which local government decisions regarding the management of Fremantle take place.

5. RARITY

The Fremantle Town Hall is a rare example of Victorian Free Classical civic architecture in Western Australia. It is the only Town Hall in the metropolitan area that remains almost entirely unaltered from the time of its construction.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

³³ Apperley, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) p59

The Fremantle Town Hall represents the principal characteristics of Free Victorian Architectural and also represents the civic dignity, pride and confidence embodied in the design of town halls throughout Australia.

CONDITION

Following the conservation program in 1984-5, the Fremantle Town Hall is in sound condition.

INTEGRITY

The building has been restored and continues to be used for the purpose for which it was designed. It has a very high degree of integrity.

AUTHENTICITY

While some alterations have occurred to the building over the last century the fabric of the Town Hall is largely intact, and it has a high degree of authenticity.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Fremantle Town Hall has cultural significance for the following reasons;

the building is a fine example of Victorian Free Classical civic architecture, demonstrating the civic pride and confidence of the Fremantle community,
the building occupies a strategic position at the intersection of William and High Streets, making a major contribution to the streetscape of the West End of Fremantle,
the Town Hall clock tower is a well established landmark in Fremantle, identifying the civic centre of the city,
for more than a century the Town Hall has been the focal point of the civic and cultural activities of the Fremantle community, a role it continues to play.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry	20/11/1992
Permanent Entry	09/11/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985)

Ewers, J. *The Western Gateway: A History of Fremantle* (F.Daniels, Perth, 1971) quoted in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.4

Minutes of Fremantle Town Council, 9th May, 1881.

Pictorial Australian Vol 1 (new series) No.9 Sept. 1885 p159

The Weekly Times 25 June, 1887

The West Australian 24th June, 1887.

The Weekly Times 25 June, 1887

The Inquirer and Commercial News 21 August, 1889

Charles A. D'Ebro account dated 25 May, 1887 cited in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A 2.5

Ward, K., *A Fremantle Sketchbook* , p.6.

Western Mail, 15July 1898, p.7.

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The name of the square was changed in 1984 as part of the redevelopment of Fremantle for the America's Cup.

PWD plan dated 1896 cited in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.9

Pictorial Australian Vol 1 (new series) No.9 Sept. 1885 p159 quoted in Considine and Griffiths, Architects: *Fremantle Town Hall. Conservation Analysis and Plan.* (Cottesloe, April 1985) A2.6. notes to the above also supplied by Considine and Griffiths.