



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

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

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Perth Town Hall is an fine example of Victorian Free Gothic of architecture. The place is significant in its bold use of diverse historic details, resulting in a rich visual and textural quality unrivalled in Australia. (Criterion 1.2)

Perth Town Hall, with its prominent clock tower, defines the corner of Barrack and Hay Streets and is readily recognised as a central Perth landmark. (Criterion 1.3)

Perth Town Hall has aesthetic value as a component of the precinct of individual buildings, which collectively form a significant cultural environment associated with the nineteenth century political, legal, and religious administration of the Western Australian colony. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Perth Town Hall has significance for its association with the State's history of penal transportation. It is an example of a public building constructed during a period when the colony's infrastructure was consolidated and the building stock increased with the aid of convict labour. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The place is valued by the community for its association with a large number of prominent people involved in the local administration of Perth. (Criterion 4.1)

Having provided a focus for civic administration, political activities and social functions since 1870, *Perth Town Hall* provides the community with a strong sense of place, time and continuity. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

With its open undercroft and first floor main hall the *Perth Town Hall* has significance as a rare example of an Australian town hall modelled on fourteenth century European market town halls. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Perth Town Hall is representative of the free adaptation of Gothic stylistic elements by nineteenth century architects. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Given the age of the building, the fabric of the *Perth Town Hall* is in good condition.

The poor quality of the colonial bricks is a problem that requires continual maintenance and, according to the 1995 Conservation Plan by Hocking Lovell and Associates, are compromising the structural integrity of the tower. For a full report on the condition of the place and the proposed schedule of works please refer to Hocking Lovell and Associates: 'Central Government Precinct, Perth. Conservation Plan', Vols. 1 & 2. (for Premier's Capital City Committee and HCWA, March 1995). For information about the condition of the place, see Vol. 1. p. 135.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Perth Town Hall is a well used public building which has been adapted to suit changing requirements and to maintain its continuity of use. A number of alterations have occurred to the building, in particular, the structural alterations to the undercroft in 1925 and 1957, that compromise the original design.

Although no longer used for administrative purposes, the place continues to fulfil a number of civic functions. The place retains a reasonable degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Over the years, the place has seen a number of minor additions and remodelling, but also some major alterations, including demolition of the street-level archways, that may be difficult to reverse. However, overall the building retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Perth Town Hall was built in the Victorian Free Gothic style and officially opened in 1870, although construction commenced in 1867. Its purpose was to provide a central civic and social facility for the growing Swan River Colony.

In 1850, following much debate, the first convicts arrived at the Colony. The presence of a large pool of controlled, mobile, male labour had a large impact on the social and economic fabric of the colony. Convict labour was utilised to construct a number of public buildings that had previously not been feasible. Although transportation of convicts did not actually cease until 1868, it was already known by 1864 that it would do so. With this in mind, construction of public buildings using convict labour progressed quickly. *Perth Town Hall* was one such building.

In the early 1860s, Governor Hampton set about fulfilling his promise to employ the skill and labour potential of the Convict Establishment for the benefit of the colonists. Colonel Henderson and his clerk-of-courts James Manning were seconded to the Colonial Administration for that purpose.

The major works planned by Hampton were the completion of Government House, a Barracks for the Perth company of Pensioner Guards, and a Town Hall. It was early in 1867 that Governor Hampton informed the Perth City Council that he intended to build a town hall and present it to the city.¹

A site on the corner of Howick (now Hay) and Barrack Streets, which had been vacant for some forty years, was selected for the construction of the Town Hall, and the first spade was sunk on 10 April 1867. The site was on a slight rise, and at the time was clearly visible from all directions.

As soon as the site was selected, the City Council called for suitable plans for the building. The *Inquirer* of 10 April 1867, states: ¹

Two styles were prepared by the architect, Mr Jewell, the rejected style being that known as the English Gothic of the fifteenth century. The one to be adopted, after being partially approved by His Excellency, was courteously submitted to the City Council on Wednesday last, and also met with their unanimous approval.²

However, the memorial plaque on the western wall records as joint architects R. Jewell and J. Manning. During the speeches at the opening ceremony, the roles played by each man were clearly recognised.³ Manning in particular was responsible for the jarrah roof trusses which extended the structural principles previously used in the Fremantle Prison.⁴

¹ Stannage, C.T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City*, (Perth City Council, 1979), p. 147.

² *Inquirer*, 10 April 1867, p. 2.

³ Phelps, D., 'Reflections on the Perth Town Hall' in *Early Days*, Vol. 6, Part 8, 1969, p. 90.

⁴ Pitt Morison, M and White, J (eds), *Western Towns and Buildings*, (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979), p.103.

In most cases, Richard Roach Jewell, Clerk of Works of the Colonial Establishment, and James Manning, Clerk of Works of the Convict Establishment of the Imperial Government worked together closely, in design and construction.⁵ Jewell had arrived in the Swan River Colony in 1852, and his first building was the *Perth Gaol and Courthouse* (1853-56). He would remain in office until 1885, having been responsible for the design of a number of prominent Perth buildings, including the *Pensioner Barracks* (1863), the west wing of the *Central Government Offices* (1874), and the lower two storeys of the east wing in 1882.

The foundations for *Perth Town Hall* were laid by free tradesmen in the employ of bricklayer and builder William Buggins. On 24 May 1867- the Queen's birthday - Governor Hampton set the foundation stone in the north-east corner of the tower, commenting, 'Gentlemen, you have done your part well, it but now remains for me to do mine and that is to show what can be effected by convict labour properly directed.'⁶

By September 1868, wall plate level was reached but the 12 months originally quoted for completion extended to three years. During this time Governor Weld replaced Governor Hampton and several problems arose on site so that the completed building was somewhat changed from the original design. For example, the ceiling of the Gallery was altered, the initials J. S. H.. (in honour of Governor Hampton) intended for the west and principal windows became F. A. W. (in recognition of Governor Weld) and the tower, originally 100ft. high, was raised to 125ft. with an iron palisade for would-be viewers.⁷ Over the years many panoramic photographs have been taken from this vantage point, providing a continuous visual record of the development of the surrounding city centre.

The original clock in the tower came from Thwaites & Reed of Clerkenwell, London, one of the oldest turret clock makers in the world. Each hand of the clock face was originally ornamented with a centre line of gold leaf. The dials are made of glass of double thickness originally glazed in 'new patent' opal.

On 1 June 1870, Foundation Day, *Perth Town Hall* was officially opened. The ceremony was led by Bishop Hale to a program drawn up by the City Council and attended by upwards of 900 people. Governor Weld duly handed the responsibility of administering the Town Hall over to the City Council of Perth. A memorial plaque in a niche in the western facade of the Tower marks the occasion. The final cost of the building quoted in the government *Blue Book* for the year 1870, was £4,567/0/11, exclusive of convict labour.⁸

At the time of the opening of *Perth Town Hall*, speakers stressed that the Hall symbolised the harmony of interests in the colony. This was not to say;

⁵ Morel, F., 'Symbol and Social Control: Public Architecture in the Swan River Colony 1851-1870', (Department of History, Honours dissertation, UWA, 1986), pp. 53-54.

⁶ *Inquirer*, 29 May 1867.

⁷ Campbell, R. McK., 'Perth Town Hall: Conservation'" (commissioned by PCC, June 1986), p. 1.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

however, that the Town Hall was not going to be the scene of protest or dissent at some time. *Perth Town Hall* was:

to be the meeting place of the citizens of Perth, a forum for Government of the city and discussion of matters of importance. Although eligibility for office was based on land ownership the Town Hall was to be a place for the people of Perth to come and participate in the life of the city.⁹

The opening of *Perth Town Hall* coincided with the announcement that Western Australia had been granted representative government. The Governor referred to this in his address at the opening ceremony:

I take this moment to bid you to bear well in mind that your new form of Government, like this hall, is wide enough to embrace within its four corners all classes of the community, differences of opinion, majorities and minorities and all varied interests; yet to make them work together you must steadily bear in mind that motto 'commune bonum' - the public good, so felicitously inscribed on their banner by the City Council.¹⁰

Subsequently a Legislative Council Chamber was built in the courtyard at the east end of the Town Hall. On 5 December 1870, the first Legislative Assembly was sworn in at the Town Hall and early in 1871, the first meeting of the Perth City Council was held there.

The undercroft, created by open arcades and piers supporting the main hall above, was designed to house markets on the European town hall model. On 1 June 1872, a daily market was opened by Governor Weld although it only lasted a few years, being unpopular for its gloomy, vault-like recesses. As a result, the undercroft soon began to be enclosed for other uses.

In the 1880s, the undercroft was given over to lettable offices described as 'Town Hall Chambers', and office space for Council staff. Around the turn-of-the-century it was suggested that *Perth Town Hall* be demolished to make way for new, larger accommodation. This suggestion was to be repeated a number of times over the years as at various intervals the facilities provided in the building were deemed inadequate.

One such occasion was in 1924, when City Councillors proposed demolishing the tower, or covering it with cement render, because they considered it unsafe. In 1924 there was a proposal to demolish the hall and construct a five-storey office building. The following comment demonstrates the esteem in which the building was held at the time:

For the past thirty years the advisability of demolishing the present civic building and erecting a more commodious and up-to-date structure has been in the forefront of municipal politics; but although scheme after scheme has been propounded, all have come to nought. As a matter of fact, whenever a site is proposed, emphatic protests are made from all other parts of the city.¹¹

Eventually, on 5 September 1924, twenty-five years after the debate surrounding the possible demolition of *Perth Town Hall* commenced, the Council resolved to purchase the Strelitz Building in Murray Street for offices

⁹ Morel, p. 53.

¹⁰ *Inquirer*, 8 June 1870.

¹¹ Cited in Campbell, p. 4.

and council chambers, and to finance the proposal by the revenue obtainable from the conversion of the ground floor of the Town Hall to shops.

In the first of a series of major structural changes, the brick arcades on the Hay Street frontage were removed in 1925 and replaced with steel columns and beams to form shop fronts, the contract having been won by Messrs. A. E. Brine & Sons. Following several rounds of minor alterations and improvements, major works were again undertaken in 1957/59 which resulted in the current external appearance of the shops and colonnade; and, further internal repairs and renovations to the hall were made in 1972.¹²

Today, *Perth Town Hall* is an integral component of an historic precinct of colonial buildings that form the centre point of the city.

For a further discussion of the *Perth Town Hall* see Hocking Lovell and Associates: 'Central Government Precinct, Perth. Conservation Plan', Vols. 1 & 2. (for Premier's Capital City Committee and HCWA, March 1995). Vol.1. pp. 107-156.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Perth Town Hall is built with a hall above a market undercroft in a European tradition in Victorian Free Gothic style.¹³

Perth Town Hall is sited on the corner of Hay and Barrack Streets and is the oldest component of the precinct of central government offices of colonial buildings.

Perth Town Hall is a longitudinal shaped building built in Flemish bond brickwork with a gabled roof and towers in each of its four corners that contain staircases.

The building was built as an arcade of Tudor arches, forming a covered market, the inner line of which carries thick, brick walls, supporting the hammerbeam roofed hall above. Inside the arcades, the floor of the hall is carried on a framework of jarrah beams which span over brick piers.

Over the arcades were ancillary rooms half hidden behind the first floor parapet. The main hall was raised higher and roofed over jarrah shingles on laminated timber trusses. The roof features brick gabled ends with rendered copings to the pediments.

The two storeys are differentiated by moulded stone, heraldic shields and rendered bands. Dentils feature on the upper level.

A main feature of the building is the use of multiple window panels. The building contains rounded and flat arched windows. Tudor arches feature over the windows on the west elevation. Bold rendered reveals decorate the

¹² Further detail regarding the additions, alterations and remodelling that occurred is contained in the physical evidence section.

¹³ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989), pp. 82-85.

windows and mullions. The west elevation features a corbelled concentric arch surround to the round window in the brick gabled end.

The north-west corner tower is taller than the other three and features a clock and tourelle, and capped with a steep pyramidal roof with prominent vents. Pinnacles feature at each corner of the towers. A battlemented parapet and brick corbels decorate the tourelle. An iron palisade decorates the roof summit. A commemorative tablet on the Barrack Street wall of the tower indicates the site of the foundation of the city.

As mentioned briefly, over the years there has been a continuous program of additions, alterations and remodelling (sometimes controversial) thus enabling the building to meet changing requirements and therefore be in continuous use.

Alterations commenced soon after construction with the gradual enclosure of the undercroft markets from the mid-1870s.

In 1924, when the Council moved to Murray Street, it was decided to construct shops on the ground floor. The improvements included the addition of facilities such as supper rooms, kitchen, the stage reconstructed, remodelling of the gallery and public conveniences provided.

The conversion of the undercroft to shops involved major structural alterations such as removing the brick arcades on Hay and Barrack Streets and building new columns and beams over the shop fronts with a cantilever awning over the footpath¹⁴ The remaining brickwork at ground floor level is granite faced.

In 1937, the gallery front was extended out over the hall supported on two columns over ground floor piers. This extension necessitated the bricking up of windows in the hall. The roof of the supper room, south, was raised by altering its shape from skillion to pitched, improving the headroom but impairing the drainage. The hall was fitted with a new proscenium, a new ventilation system, new wiring, and a new public address system.¹⁵

In 1938, the north supper room roof was changed from pitched to skillion penetrated by induct vents to carry fresh air to the hall. Other alterations include, new switch room, first floor Gents toilet, back stage change rooms and rooflights. A proposal was made for a direct stair from the stage to the artistes toilets. The Barrack Street stair appears to be in place.¹⁶

In 1945, the hall was re-floored over the top of existing construction.

¹⁴ City Engineer's structural details. (PCC Archives); A. E. & E. B. Cox drawing (PCC Archives); Souvenir of the Reopening of the Town Hall.

¹⁵ Drawing No. 62/39 of 18.03.1927 (PCC Archives); Contract No. 22/37, E. S. Roberts & 42/1937 (PCC Files).

¹⁶ Building Surveyor's Report (PCC Files); Drawing No. 11/39 (PCC Archives).

Apart from the photograph of the Tower in 1948, showing the tower covered in scaffolding and the newspaper headline 'Town Hall was Dangerous', nothing is known about what work was done or why.¹⁷

In 1950, alterations produced the present form of women's rest room and public toilets.¹⁸

In the 1950s, the shingle roofs were replaced with corrugated asbestos and iron. Notched weatherboards simulate shingles on the towers.¹⁹

In 1957, substantial structural additions and alterations were carried out including: removal of street awning and tie rods; removal of shopfronts; removal of brick walls between shops for footpath widening; the shops were extended; the foyer was widened and the internal flat arches constructed; windows were bricked up in the ground level of the towers, which were reclad in granite; new stainless steel and marble shopfronts were installed and new concrete floors laid over the top of the old; the Barrack Street arches were removed and replaced with steel columns and beams.²⁰

In 1959, the entire south wall was underpinned for the construction of the Rural & Industries Bank. The work was carried out by the Public Works Department, and only minor cracking occurred.²¹

In 1972, the archways were cut through the north-east tower to extend the colonnade eastwards past the 'new' R & I Bank. Old main stairs were removed and not replaced; the first floor foyer floor rebuilt. The remaining stair in the south-east corner was widened by 300mm to satisfy Public Health Department requirements, which also stipulated that the capacity of the hall be limited to 600 persons.²²

At the same time, as part of the overall renovation and repair contract, the east end windows were bricked up, cracks were patched in the north-east tower and fretted brickwork repaired. The front portion of the gallery (which had been added in 1935) was removed to eliminate the two supporting columns which were inhibiting the use of the hall and also to reduce the seating capacity as required by the Public Health Department.²³

Major repairs to the roof were made in 1993, comprising the replacement of the painted corrugated iron and corrugated asbestos cement roof coverings with colourbond finished zincalume custom orb sheeting, together with the replacement and upgrading of stormwater collection and removal systems. Two roof lanterns were also demolished at the same time.²⁴

17 *Daily News* 22 November 1948; Battye Library photograph.

18 Drawing No. no number (PCC Archives).

19 File No. 42/1937 and 38/1942 (PCC Archives).

20 Hawkins & Sands drawings and specifications (PCC Archives).

21 BMA Drawing SE20, file No. 494/59; Building Surveyor's Reports (PCC files).

22 Building Surveyor's Reports 24.01.1971 and 01.03.1972 (PCC Files); BMA Drawings No 37/17/2 - 1 & 1A.

23 Reports, specifications and drawings - Peter Hunt.

24 Correspondence HCWA file 1953, folio 52 and 62

In March 1995, a Conservation Plan for the Central Government Precinct was carried out by Hocking Lovell and Associates which looked at Perth Town Hall in the context of the other buildings on the block defined by St. George's Terrace and Barrack, Hay, Pier Streets.²⁵ The report recommends the reconstruction of the ground floor arches, the replacement of external rendering to brick balustrades and crenellations, the making good of brickwork, the removal of additions in association with the toilets, and the reconstruction of various internal elements which would more clearly define the original intention of the hall²⁶ and the 'investigation and remediation of the apparent failure of the tower.'²⁷

13.3 REFERENCES

Campbell, R. McK., 'Perth Town Hall: Conservation' (commissioned by PCC, June 1986).

Hocking Lovell and Associates: 'Central Government Precinct, Perth. Conservation Plan', Vols. 1 & 2. (for Premier's Capital City Committee and HCWA, March 1995)

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet, May 1978.

²⁵ Hocking Lovell and Associates: 'Central Government Precinct, Perth. Conservation Plan', Vols. 1 & 2. (for Premier's Capital City Committee and HCWA, March 1995) Vol. 2. Fig. 1.

²⁶ *ibid.* pp. 51-52.

²⁷ *ibid.* Vol. 1. p. 135.