



## 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.

#### PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.19 Marketing and retailing
- 4.1.5 Developing city centres

#### HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 308 Commercial services and industries

#### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

*Devon House* is a very fine example a multi storey commercial building of steel and concrete construction with stucco masonry exterior in the Inter-War Art Deco style. Although one of the city's narrowest buildings, the conviction with which the place is designed makes it one of Perth's finest Art Deco style building facades. The section of building between first and fourth floor is finely detailed and intact. (Criterion 1.1)

*Devon House, Gledden Buildings and P&O Building (fmr)* is a landmark group of buildings in the Inter-War Functionalist and Art Deco styles. (Criterion 1.3)

Located at the west end of the Hay Street Mall, *Devon House, Gledden Buildings and P&O Building (fmr)* on the south side of the street and *Economic Stores* on the north side of the street visually terminate a strong collection of late nineteenth and twentieth century buildings completed before the outbreak of World War II. (Criterion 1.4)

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from 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.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J., *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O., *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

## **11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE**

*Devon House* was constructed during the Inter-War period and is representative of the rebuilding of Perth central business district during this time and was built during the period of recovery following the Great Depression, just prior to the commencement of World War II. . (Criterion 2.2)

*Devon House* was built for and later occupied as a retail store by John R Saunders Ltd (early 1950s to early 1980s), a leading Western Australian menswear chain, which had stores in Kalgoorlie and throughout the metropolitan area. (Criterion 2.3)

William Leighton designed *Devon House* while he was working with Baxter Cox. Leighton is noted for his cinema design, including the Piccadilly Theatre in the Hay Street Mall, and *Devon House* is a fine example of his other commercial work from the period. Much of his work used the architectural language of the Art Deco style and he was one of the State's foremost exponents of the style. (Criterion 2.3)

## **11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

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## **11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE**

*Devon House* is valued by the community for its contribution to the diversity of streetscapes of central Perth and in particular the Hay Street area. Together with the adjacent *Gledden Building* and the *P&O Building* on William Street, *Devon House* forms a small group of commercial buildings displaying the aesthetics of the 1930s. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

*Devon House* is an unusually narrow multi-storey Inter-War Art Deco style building in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Devon House* is representative of commercial and retail buildings constructed during the 1930s as part of the movement towards the 'modern' building design and aesthetic. It was built in the period following the post Great Depression recovery and prior to the commencement of World War II. (Criterion 6.1)

*Devon House* is a very fine example of the use of the Inter-War Art Deco style applied to a very small multi storey commercial building. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Devon House* receives minimal maintenance and suffers from reinforcement corrosion in a number of locations (concrete cancer). The

tendency has been for light maintenance and for successive decorative layers to cover original building fabric. The only major maintenance task to be undertaken has been to replace the steel construction fire escape stair to the rear of the building. Overall the place remains in fair to good condition.

#### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The original intentions of *Devon House* remain intact. The ground and first floors are used for retail clothing, the second floor as a hair dressing salon, and the remainder storage. These uses are compatible with the original intent (eg. original use in the late 1930s as a frock shop at ground floor and basement, and dressmaker, photographer and dance school above). The place retains a high degree of integrity.

#### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Devon House* has undergone little change apart from the shop fitting work to the ground floor and replacement of the original steel escape stair. Partitions to lift and stair lobbies have changed through time. The place retains a high degree of authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Jacqui Sherriff, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Philip Griffiths, Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Devon House* was constructed in 1937/38 for J R Saunders Pty, a leading Western Australian menswear chain. The building was leased out for a number of years before becoming one of the company's chain stores in the early 1950s. The place remained in the Saunders family until the 1990s, and in 2003, it continues to be used for retail purposes and for a hairdressing salon.

On 27 July 1829, not long after the official proclamation of the Swan River Colony, Lieutenant Governor Captain James Stirling posted a government notice that proclaimed 'the new stone will be laid of a New Town, to be called Perth, near to the entrance of the Estuary of the Swan River'.<sup>1</sup> The survey of the new town site began the day after the foundation ceremony on 12 August 1829.<sup>2</sup> Perth was laid out in a traditional grid pattern with streets surveyed parallel to and at right angles to the main street named St George's Terrace, thereby forming large blocks which were surveyed into smaller allotments.<sup>3</sup>

Perth was constituted a city in 1856, but its village landscape appearance<sup>4</sup> remained relatively unchanged up to the 1880s and 1890s. This was despite the erection of a number of landmark public buildings such as the Town Hall (1868-1870) during the Imperial Convict period of the late 1850s to 1870s<sup>5</sup>, and the clearing and construction of Perth roads by convict labour from the 1860s up to 1875.<sup>6</sup>

The discovery of gold in the Kimberley, Murchison and Kalgoorlie regions in the 1880s and 1890s, and the concurrent granting of Responsible

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<sup>1</sup> Stannage, C. T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City, City of Perth*, Perth, p. 30. The name Perth was chosen in honour of the birthplace of then Secretary of State of the Colonies Sir George Murray. (Markey, D. C., 'Pioneer Perth', in Gentilli, J., (ed), *Western Landscapes*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 346.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 351 – 352.

<sup>3</sup> Markey, op. cit., pp. 351 - 352.

<sup>4</sup> Building regulations drawn up in the 1830s together with the slow progress of the colony resulted in a village landscape of scattered single and two storey brick or stone residences surrounded by gardens mainly to the east of the government domain along Adelaide Terrace, and a slowly developing business area in the vicinity of the government domain to the west of Barrack Street. (Markey, op. cit., pp. 356 – 357; Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193 – 194; Campbell, R., 'Building in Western Australia 1851 – 1880', in Pitt Morison, M. & White, J. (eds.), *Western Towns and Buildings*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 90.)

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, op. cit., pp. 94 – 104; Battye, J. S. (ed), *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, Vol. 1, 1912, Facsimile Edition, Hesperian Press, 1985, p. 356. Perth was initially administered by a Town Trust after it became a city in 1856. The Town Trust was later replaced by a city council in 1871, subsequent to the proclamation of the Municipal Institutions Act of that year. (Battye, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 536; Georgiou, J., 'The Metropolitan Region', in Pitt Morison & White, op. cit., p. 247; Stannage, op. cit., p. 193.)

<sup>6</sup> Stannage, op. cit., pp. 157, 164, 170.

Government to Western Australia in 1890, had a huge impact on the development of Perth.<sup>7</sup> The physical nature of the city changed dramatically with economic prosperity and the increase of population as a result of gold rush immigration. By the turn of the twentieth century, Perth was totally transformed. Its streets were lined with elaborately styled multi-storey buildings, many of which were the design of a now large architectural profession, and developing suburbs surrounded the city.<sup>8</sup>

With the Central Railway Station to the north of the town site (completed in 1881 and rebuilt in 1894), and the government domain to the south, the area in between was consolidated as the commercial and retail centre of the Perth region.<sup>9</sup> Banks, insurance buildings and professional and commercial offices were constructed along St. George's Terrace, and businesses, shops and warehouses were established in Murray, Hay and Wellington Streets.<sup>10</sup> A number of hotels and theatres were built in this central area and large emporiums such as Foy and Gibson's and Sandover's emerged along the tram route and the shopping strip of Hay Street. Shopping arcades and passage ways were also developed in this period, allowing people to move with ease through the now busy Perth streets and providing spaces for further business outlets within the form of the narrow blocks.<sup>11</sup>

Both local and world events had a significant impact on the development of the central Perth area, and the rest of the metropolitan area, over the next forty years. The Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s affected the initial growth of the state's economy following World War One, which came as a result of the expansion of the Western Australian agricultural industry. In turn, the slow recovery from the Depression in the mid to late 1930s was halted by the outbreak of World War Two in 1939.<sup>12</sup> Although building activity during this period was quiet, several new structures appeared in the Perth central area that reflected the phases outlined above and also the culture of the time as represented in Art Deco architecture. Along St. Georges Terrace a number of financial and professional institutions had their premises modernized, complete with the remodelling of facades<sup>13</sup> and in 1936 Perth's first skyscraper, the Colonial Mutual Life Building, was built (14 storeys high - now demolished)<sup>14</sup>. In Hay Street, between William and Barrack Streets, four new arcades were constructed. *Piccadilly Theatre and Arcade* (1938) and *Plaza Theatre (fmr) and Arcade* (1937; 1940) incorporated cinemas in

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<sup>7</sup> Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193; Seddon, G. & Ravine, D., *A City and its Setting*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1986, pp. 146 – 147.

<sup>8</sup> Stannage, op. cit., pp. 193-4; Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 147. Seddon and Ravine state that: 'In 1904, 10 per cent of central Perth was still vacant land, but by 1911, there was no vacant land left.' (Stannage, op. cit., p. 243, cited in Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 152.)

<sup>9</sup> Hocking, I., 'Growth and Change in Central Perth', in Pitt Morison & White, op. cit. pp. 266 – 267.

<sup>10</sup> Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Hocking, op. cit., pp. 266 – 268.

<sup>12</sup> Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., pp. 169 – 176; Hocking, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> For an example see Bizzaca, K. & Pidgeon, J., 'The Western Australian Club', heritage assessment prepared for HCWA, January 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 176.

their design and are representative of the popularity the cinema culture in Western Australia during this period.<sup>15</sup> The urban landscape was also changed with the reclamation of the Swan River foreshore for public open space beginning in 1921 and completed by 1931.<sup>16</sup>

Lot 3 of Perth Town Lot 10 was purchased by John R Saunders Limited in October 1928.<sup>17</sup> Originally a draper from Kalgoorlie, John Saunders established a branch of his business at 499 Wellington Street in 1910.<sup>18</sup> Trained in his home town of Devon, England, Saunders had migrated to Adelaide in 1881 where he set up drapery businesses in Silverton and Broken Hill. In the early 1890s, he moved his family to the Eastern Goldfields and opened a business in Coolgardie, before moving to Hannan Street, Kalgoorlie, later that decade. In 1913, Dr Battye described Saunders' business as 'one of the best known and most popular clothing and mercery emporiums'.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the 1920s, Saunders was looking to the future and sought out another central retail site, resulting in the purchase of the Hay Street property although it was some years before John R Saunders Ltd traded from the site. Comprising a brick shop, 729 Hay Street was leased to commercial tenants.<sup>20</sup>

Saunders engaged architect A R Baxter Cox to design a new building for the site in 1936.<sup>21</sup> The building was actually designed by William Leighton, who had recently joined Baxter Cox in practice (and later became a partner). Many of the design motifs employed in the resolution of the façade were motifs frequently employed by Leighton in his cinema building facades.

Baxter Cox's call for tenders closed in November 1936. The firm received ten tenders, ranging from £7,254 to £9,353/12/0 for the

...erection of a five storey business premises and basement for J R Saunders Ltd. The building will be known as Devon House, and will have a frontage of 20ft to Hay-street by a depth of 60ft. Provision is made for two extra storeys when desired. The structure, which will be 64ft in height, will adjoin the building to be erected on the corner of Hay and William streets for the University of Western Australia. All the floors will be served by a lift and stairs having direct access from Hay-street. Glass bricks will be used from floor to ceilings with clear glass steel-framed panels for view and ventilation. The whole façade will be in light pastel

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion see Honniball, J. H. M., 'The Golden Age of Cinema in Perth', in RWAHS, *Early Days*, Vol. 8, Part 6, 1982, pp. 39 – 53.

<sup>16</sup> Seddon & Ravine, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> Certificate of Title, Volume 1005, Folio 65, registered 12 October 1928.

<sup>18</sup> Certificate of Title, Volume 346, Folio 57, registered 11 April 1910.

<sup>19</sup> J S Battye, *Cyclopedia of Western Australian History*, Hussey & Gillingham, 1913, Vol 1, p. 714. When Saunders took up the lease on the shop in Wellington Street, Perth, he placed the Kalgoorlie store under the management of his son, Robert Fox Saunders. Trading as John R Saunders Ltd, Saunders purchased the Wellington Street property in 1919 and the following year, another of his sons, Cecil R Saunders, was listed as operating the Perth store. See Certificate of Title, Volume 346, Folio 57, registered 19 May 1919; City of Perth Rate Book, Central Ward, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> City of Perth, Metropolitan Sewerage, c. 1928, MWSS&DD 1522, Sheet 20, Cons 4156, SRO; City of Perth Rate Book, Central Ward, 1930; 1936.

<sup>21</sup> *Building and Construction Journal*, 4 December 1936, pp. 4, 12. These notices regarding acceptance of tenders clearly identify A R Baxter Cox as the architect.

colours with the name of the building in projecting chromium letters on enamelled steel bars. The shop-fronts will be in black vitrolite with monel metal frames.<sup>22</sup>

The Perth City Council issued the building permit to the contractor for '£7,000 business premises' for J R Saunders at Hay Street to contractor J R Hawkins and Sons in January 1937.<sup>23</sup> Construction commenced almost immediately, with work on the adjacent Gledden Building starting at the same time.<sup>24</sup> While it has not been determined when construction was finished, a newspaper article dated July 1937 states that the building for J R Saunders Ltd was 'almost finished'. This is confirmed by a photograph of the *Gledden Building* under construction in August 1938 that shows that *Devon House* was almost finished at this time.<sup>25</sup> The City of Perth rate books list a 'shop and basement with rooms over' as being under construction for owner J R Saunders Ltd in 1937/38, with Shirleys Frock Shop as tenating the shop and basement (no tenants for other floors). The first mention of '*Devon House*' was made the following year, when Shirleys was again recorded as tenating the shop and basement, with Ron Reid, Lilian Coughlan (dressmaker), Eric Sampey (photographer) and Esler McMorrows School of Dancing occupying the three floors above.<sup>26</sup>

Other building activity in the Perth central business district at the time included *London Court, Plaza Arcade and Theatre, Steamship Building* (Adelaide Steam Company) on St George's Terrace, the *Piccadilly Arcade and Theatre* and the *Mercantile Mutual Building*. In an article on the latter, the *Building and Construction Journal* praised '...the architectural progress which is changing Perth's skyline and transforming the city into one of the most beautiful and modern in the Commonwealth'.<sup>27</sup>

A sewerage diagram dated 1943 shows *Devon House* (4/5 floors plus basement) as being occupied by Saunders Ltd. An external staircase provides access to the rear, via a laneway curling behind the Orient Line Building (*P & O Building fmr*) from William Street.<sup>28</sup>

J R Saunders Pty Ltd continued to lease the building to a variety of tenants until the early 1950s, when it opened its own outlet in the building. In 1954, the company had several stores around Perth, including the main store at 499 Wellington Street, and branches in Hay Street (*Devon House*), Midland, Victoria Park and Claremont.<sup>29</sup>

John R Saunders Limited was sold to Roger David Menswear, the firm's major competitor, in the early 1980s. The Hay Street property was retained

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22 *Building and Construction Journal*, 27 November 1936, p. 4.

23 *Building and Construction Journal*, 22 January 1937, p. 5.

24 *The West Australian*, 6 February 1937, p. 6.

25 *The West Australian*, 31 July 1937, p. 6; 14 August 1937, p. 6.

26 City of Perth Rate Book, 1937/38; 1939; *Wise's Post Office Directory*, 1940/41, p. 38.

27 *The West Australian*, 8 January 1938, p. 6; *Building and Construction Journal*, 9 September 1938, p. 9.

28 City of Perth, Metropolitan Sewerage, 1943, MWSS&DD 1522, Sheet 20, Cons 4156, SRO.

29 *The West Australian*, 10 April 1954.

by the Saunders family until November 1999, when it was transferred to Claremont Investments Pty Ltd, a company registered in Singapore.<sup>30</sup>

In *Looking Around Perth* (1981), *Devon House* is described as:

An Art Deco gem, a skyscraper in miniature made incongruous in scale by its juxtaposition with the Gledden Building. The façade is a text book display of contrasts of solid and opening, of vertical to horizontal, and in this illustrates the close alliance of the style to abstract cubism. At the roofline the typical, Art Deco, spiral-floral decorative motif introduces the craft aspects of the style, one of the essential characteristics separating it from the Cubist machine-aesthetic.<sup>31</sup>

*Devon House* was classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) in October 1989 and nominated for entry in the Register of the National Estate the following year. It has been included in the City of Perth Municipal Heritage Inventory with a recommendation that it be considered for entry in the Register of Heritage Places. The place has also been included in the Art Deco Society's survey of significant buildings from the 1930s with the same recommendation.

In 2003, *Devon House* is used for retail purposes at the ground and first floor (a surf wear clothing shop), a hairdressing salon on the second floor, with the remaining areas used for storage. A hairdressing salon has been in the building for over 50 years, retaining the name of Anthony and Nichola throughout this time although having undergone several changes in ownership.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Devon House* is a four and five storey commercial building of steel framed construction with stucco masonry exterior in the Inter-War Art Deco style, completed in 1938 to a design by Cox and Leighton for John R. Saunders.<sup>32</sup>

*Devon House* is located on the south side of the Hay Street Mall, immediately east and adjacent to the *Gledden Building*, a Perth landmark. The building is part of a group of three Inter-War buildings comprising *Devon House*, *Gledden Building* and *P&O Building (fmr)* on the south of the Hay Street Mall, together with a fourth, *Economic Stores (fmr)*, on the north side of the street, that visually terminate a whole street block of buildings related in style and time that for a visually cohesive whole. The Hay Street Mall contains an important collection of late nineteenth century and pre World War II buildings of a similar scale and mostly created within a period of forty years. The *Devon House*, *Gledden Building* and *P&O Building (fmr)* group terminates this collection at its south-west corner.

Hay Street is the narrowest of east-west axis streets, with low scale development on both sides of the street. Most buildings are two and three

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<sup>30</sup> Certificate of Title, Volume 1005, Folio 65, registered 12 November 1999. The property was transferred several times to various Saunders family members between 1948 and 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Molyneux (comp), *Looking Around Perth: A guide to the architecture of Perth and surrounding towns*, Wescolour Press, East Fremantle, 1981, p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Apperly, 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. pp.188-141.



storeys high. The road has been closed to traffic other than for service vehicles during restricted hours. Brick paving has obscured the distinction between pavement and road alignment. There is a good deal of visual clutter in the immediate vicinity of the building, with clustered sphere street lights on tall goose-necked poles, a telephone box and a young London Plane Tree (*Platanus x acerfolia*) planted in the pavement.

The building is built up to its front boundary, and extends from boundary to boundary across the front of the lot, and to the rear lot boundary on the eastern side, while the remainder of the building is held off the rear boundary to allow a steel fire escape stair to pass down the full height of the rear elevation.

The front elevation comprises a slightly taller ground floor, then four storeys of the lower height at the front of the building (a total of five storeys), and three storeys at the rear of the building (a total of four storeys).

The whole of the building's exterior masonry has a stucco finish and steel framed windows alternate with glass block windows through the full height of the building above first floor level at the front of the building. The rear elevation is a much simpler design, with rendered walls and steel framed windows rising through the full height of the building. The toilet block extends forward to the boundary and a replacement Mono-wills design fire escape stair runs the full height of the building, with a metal security screen protecting the ground floor section from unauthorised entry.

The ground floor of the front façade is a full width shopfront that opens up to give almost unimpeded display using the shop interior as the display. A deep fascia extends over the shopfront, with a deep awning over the fascia extending over the street, covered with large lettering reading 'Raw Edge Surf'. There are signs slung under the awning also. The current treatments obscure all of the original fabric at street level.

The upper floors are designed as a whole, in a series of planes, the first floor plane that is the furthest forward and this captures the whole of the first floor level; then the western plane that rises from second to fourth floor with a strong vertical emphasis, breaching the roof parapet line; then the eastern plane that has a strong horizontal emphasis, dividing each floor into three horizontal bands of glazing and horizontal bands of masonry.

The first floor has a prominent sill running across the whole elevation, with a set of three steel framed casement windows to the east, providing light to the space beyond, with a pair of steel framed casements providing light to the staircase beyond. A masonry awning extends over both sets of windows, curving back into the façade at each end. The underlying background is ruled out in stack-bond ashlar, and the words 'DEVON HOUSE' fixed over the wall finish in thin metal lettering in a style that was commonly used on Art Deco style buildings. A square cornice completes the first floor, and this cornice is broken at the centre point of the western plane element.

The western plane of the front elevation is a very tall elongated 'M' pattern, thrust forward to emphasise the stair and lift element of the plan. Each floor

is articulated with a lower band of glass blocks, then two steel framed single casement windows with each sash divided into three horizontal planes, all set within stepped architraves. A long plastic construction sign has been affixed to the east side of this element and is very intrusive. Above the windows, two stacciato (very low relief) panels terminate the interior of the recesses in which the windows are located. A row of triglyphs terminates the parapet, which is penetrated at the centre by a three-part plain crown.

The eastern plan is recessive and visually hinges off a rusticated column to the east with a series of plain and rusticated bands of masonry running back to the stair element to the west. Each floor has a low level line of glass blocks to sill height, then a steel framed window set with casement lights at each end and a fixed light in the middle. The emphasis is strongly horizontal. One window has a room air conditioner set in it. The wall terminates with a strong horizontal band of masonry ruled out with stack bond ashlar lines, with a square parapet capping.

The western elevation is entirely masked by the *Gledden Building*, while east elevation extends a floor above its neighbour, with the parapet treatment returning along the façade and routed quoins linking into the rusticated column.

The rear elevation has unpainted stucco walls, steel framed Georgian wired glass windows, a steel escape stair, steel doors to the rentable space and framed and boarded half glazed doors to the toilet, with fixed louvred glass lights to the toilet lobbies. The double doors and staircase are replacement material. A steel framed security screen at the ground floor level is a later addition.

The plan is very similar at each floor level. There is a full basement, with a stair and lift arrangement in the north-west corner, and this arrangement extends through the full height of the building. The ground floor differs to the extent that there is a full width shopfront at the property boundary on Hay Street. The first to third floors have an identical plan, with the rectangular floor plan and lift and stair core in the north-west corner, then a toilet to the south-east, accessible from the emergency stair landings at the half landing level on each occasion.

The ground floor has a full width glazed shopfront, with a pair of glazed doors, the floor finish is a modern timber applied finish, with wall lined out with timber panelling and shop display work. There is a suspended flush ceiling with recessed downlights and air conditioning outlets in it. The fit out completely conceals the original fabric within the shop. The lift has a steel part glazed door and the lift car retains its metal folding gates and original Art Deco call button system. The stair has a plastered soffit, plastered wall down to a recessed dado, glass faced cement render dado, skirting, and a concrete stair, covered in carpet at this level and up to third floor level. There are circular painted steel handrails.

The first floor continues the style of the ground floor, except that the lighting is surface mounted fluorescent lights. There are partition change rooms against the western wall. A partition has been built around the stair to

secure the retail space from the stair space, with glass doors giving access to the retail space.

The second floor is also partitioned from the stair with a plastered partition with fixed highlight, a roller security door and glass entrance doors. The main space has a vinyl floor, panelled walls, a flush suspended ceiling, surface mounted fluorescent lights, and fittings to accommodate a hairdressing business. The rear of the shop is screened off from the exterior wall to provide a service and storage area. In this area the rear windows can be seen, as previously noted. There is a service riser on the south face of the stair and it has a panel front door to it to provide access.

The toilets off the landings have the same finishes as the staircase, with the original timber framed and boarded partitioned walls, replacement basins and replacement pans.

The third floor is used for storage and has a carpeted concrete floor, painted plastered walls, a suspended 'lay-in' panel ceiling and an air conditioning unit let into the position of the highlight over the rear doors.

The stairs between the third and fourth floor remain granolithic as per the original detail.

The fourth floor is only enclosed on the north side of the building, while the rear is an open deck. It comprises a lift motor room and one other room. The floor is covered with herringbone pattern parquetry, with a coved timber skirting. This was a common floor treatment for the period (*P & O Building* and *Gledden Building*) and most likely the original floor finish.

The roof is a membrane finish with a membrane skirting against a rendered brick parapet. The latter is badly damaged in a number of locations. There are small grid steel framed windows looking south over the roof deck.

Alterations include the loss of basement pavement lights, the upgrading of toilets, the replacement of the front entrance doors and shopfront, cladding of the upper wall of the lobby in white marble, the lining out of the ground floor public space, together with the inclusion of a mezzanine and air conditioning, and the re-fitting of the first to third floors and sixth floor.

The exterior of the building, apart from the basement area, is well maintained and in good condition. Fourth and fifth floors are in fair condition. The remaining floors are well maintained and in fair to good condition. The fourth and fifth floors are more intact than any other floors and although not maintained regularly, are in fair condition. There is some moisture penetration through the street over the alignment of the pavement lights and some damage caused by water penetration through the fifth floor and sixth floor.

### **13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION**

Until the 1930s, architecture in Perth was essentially based on British examples, with some influences from America (most notably the Californian Bungalow) and the Mediterranean (University of Western Australia campus, for example). During the post-Depression years, these styles were largely

replaced by Art Deco, which was already well established overseas. By 1939, there were many buildings in Perth in the new, modern style, whether these were new buildings (such as the *Gledden Building*, Emu Brewery and a considerable number of cinemas) or remodelled older buildings (including a number of hotels and commercial buildings). Influences for such buildings were imported largely from America and reflected functional aesthetics and a beauty based on primary geometric forms, and were associated with the new technological age with its emphasis on engineering and industry.<sup>33</sup>

*Devon House* represents the transition of Perth's architecture derived from traditional British influences to that of the modern style, largely imported from America.

### **W T Leighton**

William T Leighton was one of Western Australia's most highly respected architects during the 1930s, specialising in cinema design. Leighton was born in Fremantle in 1905 and after an apprenticeship at the architectural offices of Allen & Nicholas in Fremantle, was one of the first group of architects to be registered as part of the WA Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.<sup>34</sup> Leighton then worked in the architectural offices of Eales and Cohen before joining Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson, who sent him on interstate and overseas commissions. In 1936, Leighton formed a partnership with the firm Baxter Cox, which dissolved in the mid-1940s. He joined the Public Works Department for a short time after World War II, before being offered a partnership with Hobbs, Winning and Leighton. Leighton retired in 1975.<sup>35</sup>

According to an article in the Art Deco Society of WA's newsletter, Leighton was able to combine the 'decorative elements of the Art Deco idiom with the simple geometry of the International Moderne style'. This is particularly noticeable in the Institute of Agriculture Building on the University of Western Australia campus at Crawley and in *Devon House*.<sup>36</sup>

Other buildings Leighton designed or worked on include:

- State Theatre, Melbourne (c. 1930)
- Civic Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand (c. 1930)
- Embassy Theatre, Sydney (c. 1933)
- *Piccadilly Theatre and Arcade* (1938; RHP)
- Windsor Theatre, Nedlands (1938; RHP)

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<sup>33</sup> Robyn Taylor, 'Images of Modernity in Perth's Architecture during the 1930s', in David Bromfield, Melissa Harpley & Pippa Tandy (eds), *Aspects of Perth Modernism 1929-1942: A catalogue for the exhibition organised by Julian Goddard and the Centre for Fine Arts*, University of Western Australia, Centre for Fine Arts, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1986, pp. 25-28.

<sup>34</sup> *Waltzing Moderne*, volume 5, number, December 1992-January 1993, p. 11. His contemporaries included William G Bennett, Len Walters and Marshall Clifton.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

- Cygnet Theatre (formerly Como Theatre), South Perth (1938; RHP)
- *Astor Theatre*, Mount Lawley (1939; RHP)
- Amphitheatre, War Memorial, Kings Park

*Devon House* is a late example of Leighton's known Art Deco work and makes use of almost all of the architectural language that he developed for use in a wide range of buildings. It is a very small building, rich in decorative detail and the façade above canopy level retains a high degree of authenticity.

#### **Other commercial buildings on RHP in the Inter-War Art Deco style:–**

There are 36 places on the Register of Heritage Places in the Inter-War Art Deco and Inter-War Functionalist styles, of which 14 are commercial buildings. The majority of these buildings are halls or theatres/cinemas. There are 28 Interwar commercial buildings on the State Register of Heritage places, of which 14 were constructed between 1930 and 1940. Of these, seven are in central Perth and another two are in the Perth metropolitan area.

Comparable examples by age of construction and style are:

- *Criterion Hotel*, 560 Hay Street: brick hotel building of three storeys plus basement constructed in 1937 in the Art Deco style.
- *Harper's Buildings*, 810-820 Hay Street: two storey brick and concrete building constructed in 1937 in the Inter-War Functionalist style, with four retail stores at ground level.
- *Gledden Building*, 723 Hay Street: 7 storey reinforced concrete building with basement and a two level shopping arcade with office accommodation above, constructed in 1937/38 in the Art Deco style.

*Devon House* is a good example of a commercial building constructed during this period in the Art Deco style and is a much smaller building (street frontage) than any of the examples cited.

#### **Narrow Inter-War Buildings**

A visual analysis of the Hay, William, Murray, and Barrack streets revealed a number of narrow buildings constructed in the Federation period. There were no buildings constructed in the Inter-War period any where near as narrow as *Devon House*.

### **13. 4 KEY REFERENCES**

No Key References

### **13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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