



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

Narrogin Railway Station is an important element in the townscape of Narrogin. As part of the Gnarojin Park precinct, it forms a visual link between the business district of the town and the creek, which is a feature of the landscape. (Criteria 1.3, 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

As the major junction on the Upper Great Southern railway system, *Narrogin Railway Station* played an important role in the development of the railway infrastructure of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

Narrogin Railway Station was the centre of Western Australian Government Railway's maintenance and administration operations in the Great Southern district for almost eighty years. (Criterion 2.2)

Narrogin Railway Station has a close association with the staff of the railway, the passengers and the staff of the Refreshment room, which was a popular social venue. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Narrogin Railway Station has value for its contribution to the understanding of the nature and operations of transportation (road and rail) in Western Australia. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Narrogin Railway Station is important to the Narrogin community. The formation of a 'Friends of the [Narrogin] Railway Committee', in 1994, to lobby Westrail for the retention of the place for community purposes supports this. (Criterion 4.1)

Narrogin Railway Station has an important place in the community of the township, and the wider district, for its social context as well as for its former role as a transport interchange for the economic produce of the district. As with many railway stations, it contributed to the local

community's sense of place - providing both a psychological and a physical focus for the township, and a gateway for the district. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Narrogin Railway Station represents the importance of rail transportation in the development of country towns, a function which has been largely superseded by road transportation. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Narrogin Railway Station demonstrates the principal characteristics of a railway station of the 1920s in Western Australia. The form and function of the place is clearly distinguishable in the existing fabric. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

The assessment commissioned by Westrail, and documented by BSD Consultants, indicates that the buildings are generally structurally sound and that, despite structural damage to the telecommunications room and some instability in the latrine structure, the place can be returned to a sound condition. Work on the place in August 1995, by the Town of Narrogin, boarded up windows and doors to prevent vandalism.

Further discussion of the condition of the place see BSD Consultants Pty Ltd 'Narrogin Railway Station. Structural Engineering Assessment' (for Westrail, December 1993).

12.4 INTEGRITY

Narrogin Railway Station is no longer used as a railway station and is currently unused. The place is capable of being conserved and the cultural heritage values retained. See *Friends of the Railways Advisory Committee: 'The Heart of a Town. A Report into the Narrogin Railway Station and its Environs'* (Submitted by 'Friends of the Railways' Advisory Committee to the Town of Narrogin, October 1994). For an analysis of integrity see BSD Consultants Pty Ltd 'Narrogin Railway Station. Structural Engineering Assessment' (for Westrail, December 1993).

Narrogin Railway Station has a moderate degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Despite changes to the internal layout of the rooms of the Station, the external form and character of the fabric is unchanged. *Narrogin Railway Station* has a relatively high degree of authenticity. See BSD Consultants Pty Ltd 'Narrogin Railway Station. Structural Engineering Assessment' (for Westrail, December 1993).

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The information has been compiled by external consultants.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Narrogin Railway Station, constructed of brick and iron was built, in 1907, by J. V. Miles of Subiaco for the Western Australian Government Railways.¹

In 1881, the Government was looking for faster transport between Albany and Perth as at that time the coach journey took five days. A feasibility study suggested that the most efficient and cost effective solution would be a railway line routed through Narrogin, then little more than a few dirt tracks and a wayside inn.² It was proposed to build the line by the land grant system, whereby the Government gave grants of land along the route to the builders of the railway at so many acres per mile of line constructed. Because land along the route from Perth to Beverley had already been taken up, the Government constructed the Perth to Beverley leg itself and, in 1883, called for proposals from interested parties for the Beverley to Albany section.

The proposal put forward by Anthony Hordern was accepted, in 1884, and ratified with the Beverley-Albany Railway Act of that year.³ In return for building the railway line, Hordern's English syndicate, the West Australian Land Company Ltd, was to receive 40 square miles of land per mile of track on alternating sides of the line. The Company planned to sell the land to the 5000 migrants they were to introduce to the colony and, for which, the Government would pay them £10 per head. In this way it was anticipated that the country would be opened up and populated, and the Company would make a profit.

The line was built, and opened in 1889, with the complete Perth to Albany line being known as the Great Southern Railway. But the Company had difficulty attracting migrants, and the Government's offer of free land to farmers, did not help the project.⁴ Company freight rates were also higher than Government rates. In 1897, Western Australian Government Railways (WAGR) purchased the Beverley-Albany line (plus the original land grants) for £1100000.⁵

From the beginning WAGR set up Narrogin as the centre of railway maintenance and administration for the Great Southern as it was in the most central position.

As well as the new station built, in 1907, to replace the original timber building, a 7 million gallon water storage reservoir was constructed across the creek, and marshalling yards were built. In 1907-8, the locomotive

¹ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 12 October 1906, p. 3037.

² Pustkuchen, O. E. *The Way Through: The story of Narrogin*. (Artlook Books Trust, Perth, 1981). p. 81.

³ *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 25 September 1884, p. 491.

⁴ Yearbook of Western Australia, 1897. p. 102; *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 1889. p. 313.

⁵ Yearbook of Western Australia, 1897. p. 69.

sheds were moved from Wagin to Narrogin and erected in the locomotive yard situated at the southern end of the town.⁶

Narrogin Railway Station serviced goods and passenger trains from Perth to Albany, and Albany to Perth every day, as well as the branch services. Branch lines were constructed from Narrogin to Collie in 1907; to Wickepin in 1909; and to Dwarda in 1926.⁷

The goods trains carried agricultural produce to the coast. Cereals, fruit, potatoes, bagged wheat, oats and chaff, and bales of wool were railed. Machinery and manures were brought back for the farmers.⁸ It was reported that, during harvesting, 'on several occasions, the Station Master at Narrogin, M. Street, received 300 trucks in one day.'⁹

There were passenger trains to and from Albany and Perth every day, the journey between the two major towns taking seven hours. The Refreshment Room and bar remained open for midnight trains but it was frequented by the locals as well as passengers. It was a popular place for cheap coffee and a pie for the young people of the town, and the bar was open until about 2 am.¹⁰

In the early 1920s, the Klondyke, (bush) marshalling yards were built on the eastern side of the station, originally with six lines, but later extended to eight.¹¹

The township of Narrogin flourished as a result of the railway activity. In 1921, twenty new commercial buildings were constructed including a flour mill, butter factory, doll factory, ice works, and bacon and cordial factories.¹² In the 1950s Westrail (WAGR's name since 1949) constructed more than fifty timber framed houses in Narrogin for staff accommodation. At this time there were in excess of 400 Westrail staff at Narrogin.¹³ In 1953, the *Reliance Weekly* reported:

Narrogin owes its very existence to the railways...An average of 34 trains are cleared through Narrogin each day, meaning that between 9,000 and 10,000 tons gross of freight is handled daily.¹⁴

In 1961, improved passenger and freight trains were introduced. But new rail coaches cost \$300,000 compared to \$40,000 - 60,000 for a bus, so railway buses began to run on alternate days and passenger services on the branch lines were discontinued.¹⁵ Rail transport for goods and passengers was having increasing difficulty competing with road transport.

⁶ Plan of Narrogin Station. Way and Works Plan 23437, WAGR, 1925.

⁷ *The Western Australian Railway Gazette*, 20 August 1908. p. 8; *Narrogin Observer*, 16 February 1909. p. 1.; Alphabetical Index of Contracts and Specifications 1901-1996, WAGR/Westrail.

⁸ *The Western Australian Railway Gazette*, 20 August 1908. p. 6, & 20 October 1908. p. 7.

⁹ *ibid.* 20 March 1909. p. 18.

¹⁰ Pustkuchen, p. 88.

¹¹ Narrogin Station Progress Plan, 1920-1943. Way and Works Plan 24845, WAGR; White, Maurie. *The Mighty Heart*. (1992).

¹² *The Western Australian Railway Gazette*, 22 November 1921. p. 11.

¹³ *Narrogin Observer*, 12 September 1990.

¹⁴ *Reliance Weekly*, 30 April 1953.

¹⁵ White, Maurie. *The Mighty Heart*. (1992).

By 1971, the steam engines had all been replaced by diesel, which were faster, stronger and less likely to cause a fire. However, they also required less staff to run and maintain and, by 1978, when the last passenger train ran from Albany to Perth, staff numbers were down to below 300.¹⁶ Throughout the 1980s Westrail continued its policy of scaling down its operations in Narrogin. The lines in the bush marshalling yard were removed and the station itself no longer operated. Staff levels in 1990 had been reduced to around 100, and more were expected to go as the engineering and maintenance sections were scaled down.¹⁷

Station Buildings and Platform.

Narrogin Railway Station built, in 1907, had two island platforms connected to the town by a wooden footbridge, with the station buildings constructed on the eastern platform.¹⁸

These buildings consisted of four sections:

1. Booking hall, Station Master's office, instrument room, parcel's office and porter's room.
2. Ladies waiting room
3. Bar and refreshment room.
4. Men's lavatory, and lamp room.

Over the years the internal layout of the buildings has altered considerably to suit the changing needs of the station and its users, with a major rearrangement carried out in 1952, at which time buildings 1 and 2 (above) were joined together.¹⁹

In 1961, with the end of branchline passenger services, the western platform was removed. New buffet cars on the passenger trains made the refreshment room at the station obsolete and it closed later that same year, to be converted into the Station Master's office and guard's locker room.²⁰ In 1967, the exterior of the station buildings was painted.²¹

Footbridge.

A timber footbridge was built in 1906-7 to connect the western side of town to the island platforms and, in the 1920's, it was extended across the creek.²² In 1964, the wooden footbridge was replaced by a steel structure.²³ Some concrete pillars remain to mark the position of the original wooden bridge.²⁴

¹⁶ *Narrogin Observer*, 1978.

¹⁷ *Narrogin Observer*, 1980s & 1990.

¹⁸ Narrogin Station Progress Plan, 1920-1943. Way and Works Plan 24845, WAGR; Narrogin Station buildings and improvements 1951-1976, Westrail.

¹⁹ Narrogin Station Progress Plan, 1920-1943. Way and Works Plan 24845, WAGR; Narrogin Station buildings and improvements, 1951-1976, Westrail.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Narrogin Station Progress Plan, 1920-1943. Way and Works Plan 24845, WAGR; Narrogin Station buildings and improvements, 1951-1976, Westrail.

²³ Alphabetical Index to Contracts and Specifications, 1901-1966. WAGR/Westrail.

²⁴ White, Maurie. *The Mighty Heart*. (1992).

Signal Cabin.

The signal cabin was constructed, in 1965, to replace the fixed signal ground frames.²⁵ The cabin was taken out of operation in the 1990s.

Goods Shed.

The original goods shed was built in 1889. In 1922, following the Royal Commission Report on the System of State Railways in Western Australia, a new building was erected approximately four times larger than the original, to handle the volume of goods passing through the junction.²⁶ This building is still standing.

For further supporting information see Friends of the Railways Advisory Committee: 'The Heart of a Town. A Report into the Narrogin Railway Station and its Environs' (Submitted by 'Friends of the Railways' Advisory Committee to the Town of Narrogin, October 1994).

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

For a detailed discussion of the physical evidence see BSD Consultants Pty Ltd 'Narrogin Railway Station. Structural Engineering Assessment' (for Westrail, December 1993).

13.3 REFERENCES

BSD Consultants Pty Ltd: 'Narrogin Railway Station. Structural Engineering Assessment' (for Westrail, December 1993).

Friends of the Railways Advisory Committee: 'The Heart of a Town. A Report into the Narrogin Railway Station and its Environs' (Submitted by 'Friends of the Railways' Advisory Committee to the Town of Narrogin, October 1994).

²⁵ Narrogin Station buildings and improvements, 1951-1976, Westrail; Alphabetical Index to Contracts and Specifications, 1901-1966, WAGR/Westrail.

²⁶ Narrogin Station Progress Plan, 1920-43. Way and Works Plan 24845, WAGR; *Western Australian Government Gazette*, 1922. p. 249.