



# 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

*Fremantle Post Office* exhibits an interesting exterior design, created by the asymmetrical massing and subtle repetitions of motifs, striation and fenestration which creates a dynamic yet subdued building of impressive complexity. (Criteria 1.1, 1.2)

The facade and interior lantern of *Fremantle Post Office* display technical accomplishment. (Criterion 1.2)

*Fremantle Post Office* is a landmark building which, with its strong sculptural form, addresses Pioneer Reserve and the Fremantle Railway Station, and defines the north-eastern corner of Market Street. (Criteria 1.3)

*Fremantle Post Office* makes a major contribution to the streetscape of Market Street, forming, with the *Railway Station* a 'gateway' to the West End of Fremantle. (Criterion 1.4)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The relocation of Fremantle postal services from Croke Street to a new building in Market Street demonstrates the shift in commercial and mercantile activities in the city following the completion of the inner harbour wharf. (Criteria 2.1, 2.2)

The construction of a new larger post office in Fremantle, in the early 1900s, demonstrates the rapid growth in population and the increased demand for postal and telegraph services in Western Australia as a result of the gold boom. (Criterion 2.1)

*Fremantle Post Office* has value as an historic public building, which demonstrates the importance of Fremantle as a port and commercial centre at the turn of the century. (Criterion 2.2)

*Fremantle Post Office* has a close association with Hillson Beasley, Chief Architect of the PWD, who designed the building. (Criterion 2.3)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

#### 11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

*Fremantle Post Office* had an important role in providing communication services to Fremantle's population and contributed to the growth of Fremantle. *Fremantle Post Office* still plays this role in the Fremantle community. (Criterion 4.1)

*Fremantle Post Office* contributes to the sense of place of Fremantle by its physical location at the north-eastern termination of the West End of Fremantle and by the historical associations of the building with the development of the city and its port services. (Criterion 4.2)

### 12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### 12. 1. RARITY

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#### 12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

*Fremantle Post Office* demonstrates the principal characteristics of Federation Free Style architecture, and the development of the style by Hillson Beasley with its repetition of motifs with variations (Criterion 6.1)

The size and prominent position of *Fremantle Post Office* demonstrates the importance of the postal and telegraph system in Western Australia in the early 1900s. (Criterion 6.1)

The provision of a viewing mezzanine gallery in the main mail room demonstrates the style of management practised in the postal service in the early 1900s. (Criterion 6.2)

#### 12. 3 CONDITION

A program of regular maintenance of *Fremantle Post Office* has been undertaken by Australia Post with the guidance of the Australian Heritage Commission.

*Fremantle Post Office* is in sound condition

#### 12. 4 INTEGRITY

Despite changes in postal and telegraph practice over the years, *Fremantle Post Office* is still used for the same purpose for which it was constructed.

*Fremantle Post Office* retains a high degree of integrity.

#### 12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Although there have been alteration and changes in functional requirements in nearly ninety years of use, the fabric of the building is largely intact, with a process of addition, rather than diminution, to the fabric, taking place. The removal of the original counter and fittings does not substantially reduce the authenticity of the place. The modern mail

sorting room to the south elevation could be removed without damage to the original fabric and the 1980s refit could likewise be removed if required.

*Fremantle Post Office* retains a high degree of authenticity.

## 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Fremantle was the first town to have an official 'post office' in Western Australia. On 4 December 1829, the Lieutenant Governor appointed Captain Daniel Scott, the Assistant Harbour Master in Fremantle, as the first Post Master for the Swan River Colony and the post office was located on the *Marquis of Anglesea* wreck which was situated on the south bay side of Arthur Head. The *Marquis of Anglesea* had been salvaged and refurbished as offices which were leased to the Government.

After mid 1830, the postal service was entrusted to a succession of local merchants:<sup>1</sup>

1830 4 May: Lionel Samson's establishment: Lots 27-28 Mouat Street.

1832 1 March: Charles Macfaull's Lot in Mouat Street.

1832 18 December: James Solomon's establishment at Lot 96 Pakenham Street

1833 15 February :at the Harbourmasters Office and then at the Swan Hotel Lot 275 near the corner of Queen Victoria Street and James Street.

1835 31 January: Lot 59 Henry Street.

1861 8 November: Francisco's Store facing High Street on Lots 61 Henry Street and 44 Mouat Street.

In 1869, Fremantle and Perth were linked by a private telegraph company. These offices effectively became the Post and Telegraph Offices, on 1 March 1871, when the Government assumed responsibility of the lines and staffing. The whole telegraph undertaking was purchased by the Government, on 1 January 1873.

In 1879, a Government official was appointed as a full-time post master. The service operated out of the Vice Regal Marine residence in South Terrace. (Later known as Marmion House).

In 1881, Fremantle was linked to Perth and Guildford by railway and operations moved to Finnerty Street. The volume of mail increased when Fremantle became the terminus of the Eastern Railway when that was opened as far as Chidlow's Well in 1884.

By 1889, postal business had grown so rapidly that the Colonial Government provided the new two-storey Commissariat building on the corner of Cliff and Croke Streets to serve the expanding business and residential areas of Fremantle.

In 1895, with the increased development of business activity in Fremantle, sub post offices were established in the *Fremantle Town Hall* and the first railway station, on the corner of Cliff and Phillimore Streets. These sub

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<sup>1</sup> Dates are from Pope, p. 26.  
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post offices were closed in 1907, when the new *Fremantle Post Office* was opened.

Fremantle prospered and grew as a result of the gold boom (1890 -1910). The population increased and a substantial number of new buildings were constructed in the city. After the opening of the inner harbour, in 1897, Fremantle replaced Albany as the State's principal port. A large building in a prominent location, adjacent to the new railway station, the inner harbour wharf and the new West End commercial offices was required, and the Market Street site suited this need. The tender for *Fremantle Post Office* was let on 5 September 1906 to Atkins and Law for £7926 to construct a new post office to the design of Hillson Beasley, the Chief Architect of the Public Works Department.

Hillson Beasley was a British born and educated architect who migrated to Victoria and practised architecture in Melbourne in the 1880s. He joined the Western Australian Public Works Department in 1896, eventually succeeding John Grainger as Chief Architect in 1905. Beasley is noted for his 'blood and bandages' style of red brick public architecture. Amongst notable buildings in this style are *South Perth Police Station*(1909, *Perth Modern School* (1910), and *Fremantle Technical School* (1912).

On 1 January 1907, the postal service was granted Australia Post status, in anticipation of completion of the new building, and on the 22 July 1907, *Fremantle Post Office*, on the southern corner of Market and Short Streets, opened for business. The new *Fremantle Railway Station* (1907), on the other side of Pioneer Reserve, opened in the same week.<sup>2</sup>

A contemporary description of *Fremantle Post Office* recorded:

The public entrances are through arched porches, one from Market-Street, containing the private letter boxed, and one on the corner, containing letter receivers, mail notices, etc. The public hall is 35ft. wide by 22ft. and 20ft. high, the counter being curved to give a large frontage and each department, such as letters, stamps telegrams etc., has its won section. Behind this, and enclosed by glassed partitions, is the mail room, which occupies the whole width of the ground floor and is 18ft. high. The room has windows on the front, side and back, and in addition is lighted by a lantern over the centre, and as the walls above are carried on columns and girders the whole floor space is available for business; opening off the mail room are postmasters office, strong-rooms, stairs, lavatory, and at the back is a large yard for loading mails and transacting other business.

The first floor, access to which is given by two fireproof stairs for men and women respectively, comprises telephone exchange, 37ft. by 24ft. high, with retiring room, fitters room, power and battery rooms attached, telegraph operating room, 36ft. by 31ft., and a suite of offices for staff and clerks. All rooms are amply lighted and well ventilated.

The building is designed in the Romanesque style, the treatment being severe rather than ornate as befits the character of the building and with due consideration of economy. Relief is obtained on the street fronts by setting back the first floor walls to the back of porches, thus giving balconies and accentuation the public hall.

The materials employed are brick, with dressing of cement, the internal finish being in plaster and stamped metal ceilings with tiled floors to porches and public hall, and jarrah elsewhere. The building has been designed by the architectural

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 29 June 1907, p. 19.

division of this State, acting for the Commonwealth Department for Home Affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Circa 1970, additional post and telephone boxes were installed to the south and a three storey modern mail sorting room added to the southern facade; however, little of the original fabric has been disturbed.

In 1983, in celebration of the America Cup victory and in anticipation of the Cup Challenge (1987) in Fremantle, *Fremantle Post Office* was restored. The exterior was cleaned but not altered; the interior of *Fremantle Post Office* was refitted with a nautical theme and air-conditioning and computer cabling introduced. The changes did not involve any major intervention in the fabric and, apart from the loss of the original curved postal counter at some point, *Fremantle Post Office* is substantially original.

Since its opening, Australia Post has continued to use *Fremantle Post Office* as the main Fremantle post office. *Fremantle Post Office* handles mail for all of the surrounding suburbs and is a distribution point for sea mail. Australia Post currently utilises the ground floor for postal services and operations. The upper floor of *Fremantle Post Office* is leased to Telecom. Accommodation in the more modern three level adjoining structure (1970s) to the south is also shared by Australia Post and Telecom.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Fremantle Post Office* is a three storey brick and corrugated cement sheeting (originally iron) Post Office designed in the Federation Free Style.<sup>4</sup> Situated in Market Street, Fremantle, close to the inner harbour wharf, and on the main road leading from the Railway Station to the city markets. *Fremantle Post Office* is surrounded by shops, in direct sight of the Fremantle Railway Station, which was built at the same time but has a long low form, which increases the dynamism of the larger *Fremantle Post Office* opposite Wesley Uniting Church. It overlooks Pioneer Reserve to the *Fremantle Railway Station* (1907) and defines the north-eastern corner of Fremantle's West End

*Fremantle Post Office* is taller than any other contemporary building in the immediate vicinity. Most of the nearby buildings are two storey and the position of *Fremantle Post Office* adjacent to reserve, on the north, emphasises the bulk of the building in the streetscape, and its sculptural quality. The park provides a forecourt to the northern facade of *Fremantle Post Office* and enables the building been seen to its full advantage.

The building features asymmetrical massing with a prominent gable to the Market Street facade. The Short Street facade includes two gables which feature subtly varied repetitions of similar motifs, creating a unified stylistic frontage, despite differing widths and features. The height of the building on the Market Street facade and the larger openings to the porch ways, indicate the status of this elevation, but the northern elevation is also impressive with twin gables and the entrances to the original

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<sup>3</sup> W. A. Mining, Building and Engineering Journal. 19 January 1907, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Apperly, pp. 136-139.

Postmasters residence, treated in a Georgian manner with finely detailed pediments to the doorways.

The roof features a small decorative ventilation cowl which provides an picturesque roof detail, as well as ventilation for the upper storey roof space.

*Fremantle Post* has an unusual facade. Unlike many other buildings in the West End, *Fremantle Post Office* is not built with a lot of ornate stucco decoration but is a three storey brick and stucco building in the Federation Free Style and features subtly varied repetitions of similar motifs through the facade in a 'blood and bandages' style. While not overly decorative the tension between the bulk and mass of the building, striated with alternating bands of stucco and brick, and the strong verticality of the windows, creates a dynamic sculptural effect to the place. The design has alternating colours in the vousoirs of the archways of the porch.<sup>5</sup> The rounded archways to the porches give a touch of whimsy and lightness to the street corner. The dynamism of the facade reduces the apparent bulk of the substantial building and contributes to its landmark quality.

At some stage, c. 1950s, the first floor balconies to the Market Street facade were roofed over, the balustrade removed and the areas bricked in to accommodate telephone equipment. Windows, in a style dissimilar to the existing, together with metal sunshades, were installed in the corner addressing Market Street and Short Street.

The interior of *Fremantle Post Office* is substantially as described at its opening. (see documentary evidence) Inside the main body of the building, is a large lantern which has coved pressed metal sides and timber fenestration. In the primary mail room is a row of elaborate circular decorative pierced plaster mouldings high up on the northern wall. These mouldings are openings to a small viewing mezzanine, which is accessed through the original managers office. This mezzanine was installed to observe the activities of the mail room in private. Occupants of the mezzanine could look through the holes in the plaster mouldings and view the activities of the room below.

At some point the two storey shop just south of *Fremantle Post Office* was demolished and the site used for the construction of a block of public telephones.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s, this building was demolished and a three storey addition built to accommodate a new mail sorting room with postal boxes to the Market Street facade. This structure utilises the original southern wall of the Post Office, as one wall, while the rest is of new construction. Access is via the original mail sorting room in *Fremantle Post Office*. No attempt was made to match this building to the design of *Fremantle Post Office* and it is easily identified as a separate structure.

In the early 1980s, *Fremantle Post Office* was modernised with the installation of a green pine panel wall, with glass above, dividing the mail room from the main counter. The counters were replaced with grooved timber (painted green), an office was built from the same material in the

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<sup>5</sup> Apperly, R., Irving, R., & Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*. (Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> Photographs 1910, 1970 held by Fremantle City Library.

north-eastern corner for the Postmaster, and large white tubular ducts containing air conditioning, computer and electrical services, were suspended from the ceiling. Although the original counters were removed, the other changes were superficial and did not significantly alter the original fabric of the building.

At present, the upper storey of the building is leased to Telecom Australia and, according to the Postmaster, houses exchange equipment and no structural changes have been made.. [Access was unable to be obtained.]

All work on the place in recent times has been in consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission which has jurisdiction over the place.

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

National Trust Assessment Exposition (1974)

B. Pope, F. Bush, W. Broomfield and D. Kelsall, "Historical and Architectural Assessment of Post Offices in Western Australia owned by Australia Post as at 21 July 1991" (1993)