



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.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Office of the Department of Agriculture is a simple elegant building designed in the Inter-War Free Classical Style. The balanced proportions of the front façade sit well with the tiled hipped roof which is presented to Queen Street. The building has an air of solidity and permanence which was, no doubt, the impression that the Agricultural Bank wished to convey to its customers. (Criterion 1.1)

Office of the Department of Agriculture is located on the north west corner of Queen Street and Marine Terrace and together with the Old Goal and Court House, plays a major role in visually terminating the commercial precinct of Busselton from the marine recreational environment. Due to its size and elevation, the building sits prominently on its corner location and compliments the earlier judicial complex on the eastern corner. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Office of the Department of Agriculture is associated with the development of the Agricultural Bank of Western Australia, particularly during the period when the Bank commenced its programme of decentralisation. The Agricultural Bank was extremely important to the agricultural development of Western Australia as it was responsible for expanding the State's agricultural base. (Criterion 2.2)

The establishment of a branch office in Busselton of the Agricultural Bank emphasises the role that Busselton played during the 1930s as a service centre for the Group Settlement Scheme. (Criterion 2.2)

Office of the Department of Agriculture operated as the Busselton Branch of the Agricultural Bank and provided, through its field officers, assistance to many farmers new to the district, as well as established farmers. This

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* North Ryde NSW, Angus & Robertson 1989.

assistance helped establish the farming community of Busselton and in its turn the commercial arm of the community. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Office of Department of Agriculture has significance for the people of Busselton as it contributes to their sense of place and is a reminder of the importance of the town as a service centre for the surrounding district. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Office of the Department of Agriculture is a typical example of the style of architecture known as the Inter-War Free Classical Style. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

Office of the Department of Agriculture is in very good condition and it appears to have been well maintained over the years. The present condition of the building also points to an on going maintenance programme.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The original internal layout of *Office of the Department of Agriculture* was mostly open in plan with furniture and light stud walls used to define work areas and offices. Taking into account that the building is no longer used for banking purposes the *Office of the Department of Agriculture* is considered to have retained a moderate degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The building has remained largely intact with window fittings, ceiling details and other joinery details being retained. New offices have been created in the front portion of the building using light timber stud frames. In the space beyond the public area, offices have been formed using light framed half height walls to form partitions between offices. The walls in both the front and rear areas could easily be removed and the original layout returned if desired. The original cyclone mesh fence on the western side and south sides of the building have also been retained. Some original components have been removed such as the rear external door and the original light fittings. Overall, *Office of the Department of Agriculture* is considered to have retained a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary and physical evidence has been compiled by Fiona Bush.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Office of the Department of Agriculture was constructed in 1931 and initially opened as the Agricultural Bank's Busselton Branch. The building ceased operating as a bank in 1956 when the Bank moved into rented premises due to a shortage of space in the original building. The Departments of Agriculture and Forestry moved into the vacated building and made further alterations at the rear of the building in 1966 when a new carport was added. Agriculture Western Australia currently occupy the building which is used as their Busselton Branch office.

The Agricultural Bank was the brain child of John Forrest, Premier of Western Australia from 1890 - 1901. Lean years during the 1880s saw only a small percentage of land under agricultural production and there were many who considered that the State could not progress until more land was brought into production and regulations passed that would be favourable to prospective farmers.¹ To provide some assistance to farmers, Forrest drafted new regulations in 1887 when he was Commissioner of Crown Lands; however, these fell short of any real improvements to both prospective selectors and newly established farmers.²

Once Forrest became Premier, he began work on a bill which would provide loans to prospective selectors, enabling them to acquire land and improve it. However, it was not until 26 September 1894 that Forrest's Agricultural Bank Bill was passed.³ The Bill provided for the establishment of a lending institution which would have a working capital of £100,000. The bank's manager would be able to approve loans to farmers up to £300 at a rate not to exceed 6% per annum.⁴ Initially the Bill provided for improvements which included ringbarking, fencing, cultivating, clearing, draining and the planting of vineyards or orchards.⁵ Forrest's Agricultural Bank Bill was considered innovative for its time as no other state had a similar form of assistance at the time of the Bill's proclamation.⁶ William Patterson was appointed the Bank's first Manager.

The introduction of a lending institution had considerable impact on the agricultural development of Western Australia. New lands were opened up for agriculture and the bank had trained field inspectors who visited properties to assess their viability, the needs of the farmer and to provide advice. Initially, the areas chosen were close to transport and had access to reliable supplies of water. It was not until the early twentieth century that,

¹ Spillman, K., *Horizons: A history of the Rural and Industries Bank of Western Australia*, UWA, Press, Perth, 1989, p.1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p.10.

⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid,

due to government pressure, properties were established in areas that were often considered marginal by the bank's field inspectors.

During the 1920s, the Bank commenced a policy of decentralisation and legislation was passed to permit an expenditure of £10,000 for premises. Between January 1922 and June 1923, the Bank established eight district offices in Bruce Rock, Bunbury, Geraldton, Katanning, Kellerberrin, Kununoppin, Narrogin and Northam.⁷ During this period the Bank also increased its lending to individuals, many of whom owned land in marginal areas. Ultimately much of this land was found to be unsuitable for intensive agricultural activities and by the end of the decade the Bank found that many of its clients were unable to make their repayments and many walked off the land.⁸ By the early 1930s, wheat prices were down and the world was in the grip of the early stages of the Depression. The Agricultural Bank also took on the administrative control of the Group Settlement Scheme in 1930.⁹

It was during this era of economic depression that the Busselton Branch was constructed. The establishment of the Busselton Branch was probably part of the Bank's programme of decentralisation and increasing its presence in country areas. The opening of a branch in Busselton would have had further merit as it was at the centre of Group Settlement activity.

The Busselton district was initially settled in the 1830s by the Bussell brothers and other settlers from Augusta. The present town of Busselton was originally the point where new settlers came ashore, and the main road, Queen Street, lead to the Bussells property. The town was officially gazetted in 1847. Through the years the district expanded and Busselton became the economic centre for the area.

Group Settlement was a scheme devised by James Mitchell who became Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Land and Immigration in 1919. Mitchell considered that the agricultural sector was grossly under-manned and needed an infusion of new blood. He saw the State's south west as an ideal location for dairy farms and in 1921 he initiated the Group Settlement Scheme. In 1923, by virtue of an agreement between the British, Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments, the State agreed to settle approximately 75,000 British migrants over a three year period in the State's south west. Specially selected migrants would be allocated farms which had been established in the area. The migrants were placed into groups of about 20 or more people and each group had to clear, or partially clear 25 acres on each farm. These farms were established in isolated areas and often the migrants only access to nearby townships was by horse and dray.¹⁰ Twenty-one Groups were established in the Busselton area.¹¹

⁷ Ibid, p. 41.

⁸ Ibid, p. 52.

⁹ Ibid, p. 53.

¹⁰ Gabbedy, J.P., *Group Settlement. Part 1, Its Origins: Politics and Administration*, (UWA Press, Perth, 1988).

¹¹ Gabbedy, J.P., *Group Settlement. Part 2, Its People: Their Life and Times - an Inside View*, (UWA Press, Perth, 1988), pp. 567 - 570.

The early years of the 1940s saw patrons begin to drift away from the Agricultural Bank and legislation was prepared to restructure the bank as a trading bank. Accordingly the Rural and Industries Bank Bill was presented to the Parliament on 27 September 1944.¹² The operations of the Bank would be divided into two separate sections, the Rural Department which would operate as a new business and a Government Agency Department which would continue the Bank's lending role to rural settlers.¹³ The Bank's role changed again in the 1950s when the institution opened a Savings Bank division.

There is very little documentary information available for the Bank's Busselton branch.¹⁴ Bank records indicate that the Busselton Branch opened on 30 April 1930 with Mr. W. W. Vickery appointed as Manager.¹⁵ The Bank moved into rented premises, probably to wait until a new building could be constructed.¹⁶ Plans for the Busselton Branch of the Agricultural Bank were drawn up in 1931 with tenders for the construction of the building being called for the 30 June 1931.¹⁷ Bank personnel moved out of their rented premises on Friday 30 October 1931. The new building cost £1,880 to construct and was

.... of brick throughout and (with) spacious dimensions. Fronting the building is an arcade of pleasing design, eight feet wide, and featuring three separate arches, the whole being finished in Atlas white cement. The banking chamber is thirty-three feet by twenty feet and provides ample counter space. Adjoining is a large room subdivided into glass partitioned offices for the manager and district field supervisor and providing space for the clerks. A strong room is built into one end of the room. The ceilings throughout are of plaster board, attached by battens arranged in a neat design. A septic tank system has been installed. Outbuildings comprise garage, with accommodation for two cars, petrol store room, and wood shed. A special feature of the building is that it is constructed entirely of Western Australian materials, these including bricks, cement, timber, asbestos, plaster board, roofing tiles and sanitary fittings.

The contractors are Messrs. Falkingham and Newman, and the building stands as a complete credit to them.¹⁸

The original plans confirm the writer's description.¹⁹ They show that the interior had a public area at the front with a timber counter running across the width of the building. A teller's office was located on the northern side behind the counter. A flap at the southern end of the bench permitted

¹² op. cit., p. 77.

¹³ Ibid, p. 78.

¹⁴ The earliest documentation is dated at 05/04/1956 in 'Busselton Branch File ' held by BankWest Archives.

¹⁵ Information supplied by Pam Keyes, BankWest Librarian, 29/10/98.

¹⁶ An article relating to the opening of the new branch states that bank personnel were originally housed in the building formerly known as the Group Settlement Office. *South-West News* 30/10/1931.

¹⁷ *South Western News*, 19/06/1931, p.3. Based on the banks included in the 'Statewide Survey of Banks 1829 -1939, Southern Region, Western Australia' (prepared by J. Ball, D. Kelsall & J. Pidgeon, for the National Trust (WA), November 1997) it does not appear that standard plans were employed for the design of banks during this period. A number of banks were constructed in rural centres during the Inter-War period in the Free Classical, Stripped Classical and Art Deco styles.

¹⁸ *South-West News*, 30/10/1931.

¹⁹ CAMS Ref. 1/559/0 Books 1 and 2. PWD No. 26904. No sheet number and no date.

access to the area behind the counter and to the rest of the building. The wall at the eastern end of the room is masonry and has a door centrally located in it permitting access to offices in the other half of the building. Offices, one on either side of a central passage are shown in the plan. The walls were glazed timber screens. The rest of the office area is shown as open with the safe in the north-east corner and a fireplace on the southern side towards the eastern end of the building. The physical evidence suggests that the offices were probably built as indicated on the plans as there is no evidence in the fabric to suggest masonry walls for the offices.

The layout of the office area is similar to that found today, with the exception that the light timber and glass screens have been replaced with more recent 'screens' and there is an extra office placed on either side of a central corridor. The safe with the storage area above has been retained, as has the mantelpiece, although it is no longer in use.²⁰ The only major change to this area has been the relocation of the door to the current men's toilet (the plan does not indicate male or female). On the plan, access is shown from inside the office area, whereas today this access has been blocked off and the door relocated to the outside. The plans show a four panel door however, the current door is ledged and braced.

The site plan shows that a closed picket fence enclosed the site on portions of the north west sides, then around the southern and eastern sides. The western half of the north side shows a cyclone fence which stops just short before the rear of the building. This fence is insitu while the picket fence has been removed. A garage is shown at the rear of the building together with a petrol store and wood shed.

In 1956, the Rural and Industries Bank sold the building to the Public Works Department for £7,831.²¹ As the Rural and Industries Bank had introduced a Savings Bank service at this time, it is highly likely that the Bank found that their original premises had become too small to suit their purposes. The Busselton branch moved into rented premises, and at the same time purchased a block of land in Queen Street (near the corner with Prince Street).²² The new Busselton branch of the Rural and Industries Bank was opened in 1961.²³

The Public Works Department purchased the building on 18 April 1956²⁴ and minor alterations were marked on the plans to accommodate the Departments of Agriculture and Forestry.

Further plans were drawn up in 1966 for a new car port and storage shed which were added onto the rear of the building. The existing garage was to be moved further to the south to accommodate the new garage. The new building was "L" shape in plan with a wing running north-south and a wing running east-west. The north-south wing was later converted into

²⁰ CAMS Ref. 1/559/0 Books 1 and 2. PWD No. 26904, Sheet No. 2, dated 1931. Signed: A.C. Trigg Acting Chief Architect.

²¹ Correspondence file, 'Busselton Branch', letter date 05/04/1956. BankWest Archives.

²² Correspondence file, 'Busselton Branch', various letters dating from 18/04/1956 to 26/08/1960. BankWest Archives.

²³ 'Annual Reports for Rural and Industries Bank of Western Australia', 16 Annual Report for 12 months ending 21/03/1962, p.8.

²⁴ Correspondence file, 'Busselton Branch', letter date 18/04/1956. BankWest Archives.

offices. This was achieved by replacing the large open mesh gates with brickwork into which were placed two aluminium windows on either side of a central door.

At some stage the open mesh gates on the southern wing of this structure were replaced with steel doors and the original garage replaced by the current carport.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Office of the Department of Agriculture is a single storey brick and tile building, with rendered details, designed in the Inter-War Free Classical Style. The building has a corner location and is situated directly across the road from the Old Courthouse and Police Station. The building is at the northern end of town, away from the main commercial precinct. The building has a small strip garden on the northern side, planted with Australian natives. A cyclone mesh fence separates the garden from the pavement. A car-park, sealed with bitumen is located on the southern side of the building. There is a short section of cyclone mesh fence on the southern side of the building.

The front of the building features a porch that displays a formal arcade of three arches either side of rectangular openings. Four broad pilasters, two each side of the rectangular openings, carry the frieze. The frieze, a rendered band above the arches, contains the words: 'Agriculture WESTERN AUSTRALIA' in black letters. This band also contains recessed and raised areas that form a simplified line of triglyphs and metopes. The walls of the porch and the front wall of the building are rendered. The render has been marked out to resemble ashlar masonry and then painted white. The porch has a raised concrete floor, accessed from the pavement by two steps, and a plaster and batten ceiling with a simple cornice.

The front facade is symmetrical with two large twelve paned, double-hung windows on either side of the front door. The double leaf front door is timber with four moulded sections to each leaf. A large, eight paned fanlight is located above these doors.

The sides of the building display stretcher bond brickwork with a rendered band below the eaves line that is the same as that found at the front. Six, double hung sash windows (similar in detail to the front windows) are evenly spaced down both sides of the building. The tops of the windows are just below the rendered band; they have metal lintels and bullnose brick sills. Towards the rear of the building (east), the walls slope down to accommodate a skillion roofed section, which covers a porch and toilets at the rear. A narrow louver window is located in the southern side of the skillion section.

At the rear of the building, beneath the verandah roof, are individual ladies' and men's toilets which are set on either side of an open central area that provides access to the rear of the building and the toilets. The rear door is centrally located either side of double hung sash windows. The door is glazed in the upper section with a fanlight above. In the rear wall, which encloses the toilets, there are single narrow sash windows topped with brick arches. The rear porch has a timber, tongued and

grooved floor with tongued and grooved lining boards affixed to the underside of the verandah rafters.

The roof covering the main section of the building is hipped and clad with clay tiles and the boxed eaves have decorative modillions. A rendered chimney-stack, with moulded details, is located on the southern side of the building towards the rear of the building.

Gutters are half round, with round down pipes that are painted green.

The interior of the *Office of the Department of Agriculture* is divided into two sections: the public reception area and front offices and the rear section. A small vestibule is located directly on the other side of the main doors. Entry to the building is then through a pair of timber swing doors with glazed upper sections. Both the main front doors and the swing doors are original. The swing doors open onto a central corridor with two offices located down either side of the corridor. The corridor walls are stud frame construction, covered with plaster board and are not original. All of the masonry walls, including the eastern wall which runs across the width of the building, are original. The eastern, northern and southern walls have cement dados topped with a cement quod, approximately 1.3 metres from the floor. The ceilings in the offices are plaster and batten with simple cornices. The first office on the southern side has a glassed area to permit public enquires. The public area is separated from the rear offices by a door. This door has glazing to the upper section and is not considered to be original. The timber floors are covered with carpet in the offices, while the corridor is covered with vinyl.

The rear section was apparently open in plan. At present, separate office spaces have been created using stud framed partitions that are about 2 metres high. These partitions are glazed above with a masonite lower section. The original ceiling and walls have been retained. The timber floor in this section is covered with vinyl.

The brick fireplace, which is located at the north-east end of the room, is still intact, although hidden behind a piece of masonite. The timber mantelpiece is supported by brackets which echo the modillions under the eaves.

A strong room is located in the north west corner of this area. The walls are concrete and the heavy metal door was made by F.H. Middleton of Perth. A storage area is located directly above the strong room.

The rear exit is located in the eastern wall and has been previously described. The female and male toilets have timber ledged and braced doors. The hardware is not original.

A recent addition is located at the rear of the building, abutting the rear verandah roof. It is quite separate from the *Office of the Department of Agriculture*. It is cavity brick construction with a flat roof and aluminium sliding windows. A metal framed carport, with a metal roof is located to the rear of the block and is also of recent construction.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH
