



**HERITAGE  
COUNCIL**  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## **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)**

- 3.7.2 Developing electric means of communication
- 3.16 Struggling with remoteness, hardship and failure
- 3.16.1 Dealing with hazards and disasters
- 3.26.1 Providing medical and dental services
- 6.5 Educating people in remote places
- 8.5 Forming associations
- 8.5.2 Helping other people

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

- 205 Air transport
- 209 Technology and technological change
- 404 Community services and utilities
- 506 Tourism
- 604 Innovators
- 605 Famous and infamous people

#### **11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\***

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is an example of North West vernacular architecture located in a picturesque setting among flowering trees and shrubs typical of mature gardens of the region. (Criterion 1.1)

#### **11.2 HISTORIC VALUE**

As part of a nation-wide network of RFDS bases, *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* made a significant contribution to the betterment of life to people living in remote parts of the West Kimberley over a 46 year period by providing

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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Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

communication channels and medical assistance which reduced the negative impact of isolation. (Criterion 2.2)

Royal Flying Doctor Service House was the first place, in the north west of Western Australia, to broadcast the School of the Air programme. The programme has provided children, who reside in remote locations in Western Australia, access to education since 1955. (Criterion 2.2)

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is associated with the late Reverend John Flynn, whose work was integral to the formation of Aerial Medical Service and thus to the subsequent formation of the RFDS. (Criterion 2.3)

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

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* has the potential to be a research site providing information into the layout and function of a radio station that communicated within a network of outposts situated on pastoral stations and other remote localities. (Criterion 3.1)

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* has the potential to provide type and positioning of buildings used for radio communications in Western Australia during the second half of the twentieth century. (Criterion 3.1)

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

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is valued not only by the local community but also by those people who either contributed to or are appreciative of the critical link it provided between towns and remote localities. (Criterion 4.1)

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* was an important point of call for station people, dignitaries, and travellers who visited Derby, and, from the mid-1960s, is an important tourist attraction. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* contains radio equipment that dates from the 1970s when changes occurred in radio frequency transmission band width throughout the world. (Criterion 5.1)

The radio station of *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* demonstrates the direct contact between a Royal Flying Doctor Service base and an outpost, a practise that has been discontinued in the region and the State. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is representative of working radio communications stations and RFDS bases. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is in good condition as a result of continued use and maintenance since their construction in 1955. The house is occupied, and both the house and garden are maintained to a high standard. The office was not in use at the time of inspection but a program of maintenance was in place for the building and grounds.

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

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House and Office* has moderate integrity. Although the office is no longer in use by the RFDS, the equipment remains extant. The house is occupied by RFDS staff.

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

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House and Office* has moderate authenticity. Minor internal alterations were made to the office prior to opening the building for tours in the 1990s. The residence has been altered and extended. Visually, when viewed externally, both buildings appear largely as originally constructed.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by Dr Cathie Clement, Historian and Rosemary Rosario, Architectural Heritage Consultant in November 2004 with amendments and/or additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* comprises two single-storey buildings constructed as the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) base at Derby in 1955. The place is a component of a nation-wide service through which the Reverend John Flynn brought a medical service to inland and outback people. The documentary evidence describes the place in the Western Australian context.

In 1911, after being ordained as a Presbyterian Church minister, Flynn worked as a missionary in the north of South Australia. Concern for people in remote localities prompted him to speak with others about the risks they faced. Mrs Aeneas Gunn is credited with having told him 'that if the church was to be serious in its aims to meet the needs of bush people it should institute a combined medical, social and spiritual program'. A means of initiating that program emerged when Flynn moved to the church's new unit, the Australian Inland Mission (AIM).<sup>1</sup>

In turning the Gunn ideal into a reality, Flynn focused on 'medical services in the outback, nursing homes, "boundary-riding" padres and travelling libraries'. Between 1913 and 1919, his AIM journal, *The Inlander*, reached many people. Travelling padres were seen from Pine Creek to the Pilbara, sometimes sitting astride camels or in camel-drawn vehicles. AIM nurses, who worked with people around Oodnadatta from 1912, were also posted to Port Hedland (1915), Maranboy (1917), Halls Creek (1918), Beltana (1919), Victoria River Downs (1922), Birdsville (1924), Alice Springs and Lake Grace (1926), Innamincka (1928), Esperance (1930), Dunbar (1938) and Fitzroy Crossing (1939).<sup>2</sup>

The posting of the AIM nurses to Halls Creek occurred as a result of fundraising and lobbying undertaken after Jim Darcy died there in 1917. The dramatic circumstances of his death, coupled with information offered by Lieutenant Clifford Peel (a young pilot), also gave Flynn grounds to campaign for an aerial medical service. His focus was on the need for aeroplanes to carry patients and doctors in inland, remote areas. A map published in *The Inlander* in July 1920 showed 'aeroplanes facing inland at Burketown, Cloncurry, Longreach, Charleville, Bourke, Broken Hill, Port Augusta, Marree, Oodnadatta, Kalgoorlie, Mount Magnet (W.A.), Carnarvon, Port Hedland, Derby, Wyndham and Katherine'. Individual doctors began flying to patients, and, by 1927, the AIM and QANTAS were ready to trial an aerial medical service in Cloncurry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Bilton, in association with Joan Brunt and J Macdonald Holmes, *Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia: Its Origin, Growth and Development*, Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia Federal Council, Sydney, 1961, pp. 1–5; George Wilson, *The Flying Doctor Story: A Pictorial History of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia*, Magazine Art (Aust) Pty. Ltd., Hampton (Vic), 1989, pp. 26 and 29–31.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *The Flying Doctor Story*, pp. 31, 32, 34–7 and 40; Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>3</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 8–13; Wilson, *The Flying Doctor Story*, pp. 40–49 and 51–3; Loreley A Morling, 'The Legend of Jim Darcy', *Boab Bulletin*, June 1994, pp. 11–12; Heritage Council of Western Australia (HCWA), Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Doc'n, Old Halls Creek Post

The lateness of the trial reflected the need to develop a reliable means of inland communication. George Towns tried his hand at producing suitable wireless technology, and Alf Traeger then developed a wireless set powered by a pedal generator. By September 1929, eight such sets were in place in northern and western Queensland, and the Aerial Medical Service (AMS) was operative. For the first time, station people could contact other people without leaving home. Assistance could be sought in emergencies and, when resources permitted, business and personal telegrams could be transmitted. The payments for the telegrams, handled under an official arrangement with the PMG, helped to generate funds for the AMS.<sup>4</sup>

In 1933, after a Premiers' Conference supported an AIM proposal to expand the AMS, the Australian Aerial Medical Service (AAMS) formed. It had a section in each state except Tasmania. The Victorian Section, in keeping with the selflessness of AIM services, was to establish a base outside Victoria. Alice Springs, Halls Creek, Port Hedland, and Wyndham were considered. The Western Australian Section established a base at Port Hedland (1935) and the Victorian Section opted for Wyndham. That base was to operate in association with a Wyndham–Ord River air mail service provided by an aviation company.<sup>5</sup>

The Wyndham base was established adjacent to the government hospital in 1935/1936. Alf Traeger designed and installed the wireless sets, and a contractor from Port Hedland constructed the wireless station building and quarters. The Prime Minister, the Right Hon. J A Lyons, opened the base officially on 2 September 1936 in a Canberra broadcast.<sup>6</sup>

The AAMS bases at Wyndham and Port Hedland provided medical attention and advice to people throughout the north of Western Australia. By October 1936, pedal wireless transceivers had been installed at places that included Koolan Island, Cape Leveque, the lighthouse on North-West Cape, Mount House Station in the central Kimberley, and Noonkanbah Station in the Fitzroy River valley. Another network emerged further south after the AAMS, Eastern Goldfields WA Section, took responsibility for an air ambulance established at Kalgoorlie in 1937.<sup>7</sup>

In 1942, the AAMS altered its name to The Flying Doctor Service of Australia (FDS) and resolved to standardise the medical chests that went with transceivers. Around the same time, the impact of war prompted the FDS to shift its wireless equipment from Port Hedland to Marble Bar and from Wyndham to Halls Creek. Additional wireless facilities were established at Meekatharra and remained in use after the war.<sup>8</sup>

A shortage of aircraft and pilots made it difficult for the FDS to deliver a medical service in the Kimberley during the war years. In 1945, with no suitable plane available for Wyndham, the Victorian Section entered into a commercial deal with

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Office Ruins, 07/04/1998, Data Base No. 1173, p. 5; Cathie Clement, *Old Halls Creek: A town remembered*, National Heritage (for the Kimberley Historical Sources Project), Mt. Lawley (WA), 2000, pp. 34–42.

4 Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 13–26; Wilson, *The Flying Doctor Story*, pp. 53–84.

5 Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 32–43 and 92–7.

6 *ibid.*, pp. 45–6; O'Brien Planning Consultants, Municipal Heritage Inventory for The Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, prepared for the Shire, Kununurra, May 1997, Place No. 45, Royal Flying Doctor Service.

7 Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 47–8, 97–8 and 184–5.

8 *ibid.*, pp. 52–5, 107–12 and 218–19.

MacRobertson-Miller Aviation Co. (MMA). Each fortnight, a doctor from either Broome or Derby travelled on the mail plane and saw station people between Derby and Wyndham. Provision also existed for the mail plane to be diverted if an emergency arose.<sup>9</sup> The MMA mail plane continued to carry a doctor in 1946, calling at about fifteen stations en route to Wyndham. Alternate arrangements were proposed in 1946 and 1947, e.g. flying out of Halls Creek, but were rejected.<sup>10</sup>

In 1946, the Wyndham wireless operator, Fred Ryle, left Halls Creek and took the FDS equipment back to Wyndham. Poor reception then created problems and, in 1947, he selected a new site away from the foot of the high hill known as the Bastion.<sup>11</sup> At that time, Ryle's schedule called for wireless 'sessions' at 6 a.m., 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. He followed a set pattern, taking medical calls first and then doing a 'roll-call' during which people could send and receive telegrams on their transceivers. They could also pass on messages, switch wave lengths to hold discussions, or arrange for wireless access outside the session hours. The communication enabled isolated people to gain information, solve problems and enjoy social contact.<sup>12</sup>

The new FDS base at Wyndham, situated on the Great Northern Highway three miles (4.8km) closer to the aerodrome, was completed in 1950. By that time, the FDS, Victorian Section, was contemplating a base at Derby.<sup>13</sup>

Some FDS service was already being delivered from Derby where, courtesy of the local residents, a transceiver had been installed at the hospital in 1948. It allowed either the doctor or the matron to broadcast a morning medical session, replacing some of the service previously provided by Fred Ryle. Derby also boasted a Lockheed Electra, the RMA *Gascoyne*, which had been transferred in 1950 to provide a bi-weekly flying doctor service and a bi-weekly station mail, passenger and freight service.<sup>14</sup>

In the circumstances, it was logical for the FDS, Victorian Section, to select Derby as the site for its second FDS base. That base, established to take pressure off the Wyndham base, owed much to people's generosity:

By May 1953 the Council had acquired at disposals sales two transmitters and a receiver for the proposed Derby base. Plans for the base building and the operator's residence were completed and a tender for the construction was accepted in July 1954. In 1954 the executors of the estate of the late Mrs Janet Biddlecomb of Golf Hill, Victoria, who had during her lifetime given many generous donations anonymously, gave to the Victorian Section £15,000 as one amount, a sum which assisted the section greatly. The two buildings were completed by April 1955, and furniture was ordered for the residence. A refrigerator was donated by the Kelvinator

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<sup>9</sup> 'Kimberley Flying Doctor Commences', *Western Mail*, 3 May 1945, copy held by Peter J. Bridge.

<sup>10</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 56–8.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 56 and 59.

<sup>12</sup> Beth Beckett, *Lipstick, Swag and Sweatrag: Memoirs of a Patrol Padre's Wife: The Australian Inland Mission 1947–1955*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 1998, pp. 54–5 and 58–9.

<sup>13</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 59 and 61; O'Brien Planning Consultants, Municipal Heritage Inventory, Place No. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 58–61 and 234; Frank Colquhoun, *Cockpit and Spanner: My Recollections of Early Aviation in Western Australia*, The Maylands Historical Society Incorporated, Maylands (WA), 2001, p. 111; Margaret Heseltine, *8 Whisky Charlie Victor*, private publication, Derby (WA), 2003, pp. 53–4.

Company. The Council received the co-operation of the Commonwealth Department of Housing and the W.A. State Housing Commission.<sup>15</sup>

Assistance had also come from the Department of Civil Aviation. In June 1953, the Regional Director in Perth had supported an application by the FDS, Victorian Section, 'to lease a portion of Derby Aerodrome, i.e. Lots 393 to 397 in Stanley Street, for the purpose of establishing a Radio Telephone Control Station'. Indeed, he proposed that, 'in view of the importance of the Service, . . . the area be made available at a Peppercorn rental'.<sup>16</sup> Lots 393 to 397 are situated on the east side of *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office*, i.e. on the other side of Fairbairn Street.

The official opening of the new RFDS base was significant in more ways than one. Lady Slim, the wife of Sir William Joseph Slim, performed the ceremony on 21 July 1955. The previous year, she and Sir William (Governor-General of Australia from 1953 to 1960) had expressed their willingness to be FDS patrons and, following the submission of a formal application, the Queen had granted the FDS the right to use the "Royal" prefix. Hence, when Lady Slim opened the Derby base, she was officiating at a Royal Flying Doctor Service function. Also present were her Kimberley host and hostess, the Reverend Ken Beckett (an AIM patrol padre) and his wife Beth (an occasional AIM sister at Halls Creek).<sup>17</sup> Their presence underlined the longstanding link between the AIM and the RFDS.

Graham Thornton, the first Derby base director, oversaw a turbulent period. MMA had sold RMA *Gascoyne* in 1954 and replaced it with a converted ex-RAAF Avro Anson purchased from a government disposal base. The company had then merged with Airlines (WA) Ltd to form MacRobertson–Miller Airlines (MMA). The new company was to be re-equipped with Fokker F27 turbo prop aircraft but, before that happened, a violent electrical storm claimed the Anson. The crash occurred in February 1956, killing the pilot Pieter Van Emmerick, two RFDS nurses, the male passenger, and his infant daughter (the RFDS patient). A memorial plaque at Derby airport records their deaths.<sup>18</sup>

In the late 1950s, Sir William Slim and other dignitaries visited the RFDS base at Derby. Business and tourist travel to the region was becoming more common and, as the use of air transport increased, tolerance of delays caused by patient transfers on MMA flights decreased. In 1959, the RFDS, Victorian Section, purchased the *H. V. McKay* for its Kimberley work.<sup>19</sup>

Another major change occurred the following year when a School of the Air, the first in Australia's north-west, began operating at Derby. An AIM initiative, the school used the RFDS wireless system to provide children with distance education. Other Schools of the Air operated at Alice Springs (1950), Broken Hill

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<sup>15</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> National Archives of Australia: Chief Property Officer, Perth; K273, Correspondence files, annual single number series with (from 1982) alphabetical prefixes; 1953/40, Derby - DCA - Flying Doctor Service - Lease, 1953 - 1956, p. [2], letter dated 17 June 1953, with a copy of the relevant plan on file as p. [1].

<sup>17</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 61–2 and 235–6; Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia (Victorian Section), Visitors' Book, held by RFDS, Derby; [http://www.gg.gov.au/html/fset\\_history.html](http://www.gg.gov.au/html/fset_history.html); Beckett, *Lipstick, Swag and Sweatrag*, pp. 179–80 and 185–92. It is noted that a plaque commemorating the opening was placed on the front veranda of the radio station, which is now known as the office.

<sup>18</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 61–4; Colquhoun, *Cockpit and Spanner*, pp. 122–6 and 151.

<sup>19</sup> RFDS (Victorian Section), Visitors' Book; R. C. Adkins, *I Flew for MMA: An Airline Pilot's Life*, private publication, Mt Pleasant (WA), 1996, pp. 237–8; Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, 66.

(1956), Carnarvon (c. 1958), Port Augusta (1958), Meekatharra (1959), and Cloncurry (1960). John Reid, an Education Department teacher, did the founding work at the Kimberley School of the Air. He and other later teachers occupied buildings situated in the grounds of the Derby High School.<sup>20</sup>

The year 1960 also saw the Kimberley's first RFDS Flying Sister based at Derby. Marie Osborne later recalled:

As Flying Sister I found I assisted the doctor as nurse, secretary, disher-upper of meals, disposer of paper bags and "chief dogsbody". I found my work grimy, gritty, sweaty and fascinating. Radio sessions were my responsibility, to give advice and answer queries, only calling doctor as necessary. Dental appointments were made, accommodation arranged for mothers coming in to await the birth of their babies. Medical stores were ordered for the stations and mountains of paper work done.<sup>21</sup>

One of the many inland people who valued the RFDS base at Derby was Margaret Heseletine, who lived at Udialla (on the Fitzroy River) with her husband Bob and their children. She considered their second-hand transceiver a 'lifeline'. In one particularly heavy "Wet" season, with all road access cut, she used it to arrange an aerial drop of powdered milk for the children. Another time, with two children seriously ill, she used it to transmit emergency whistle blasts that brought the Derby Hospital on air. A conversation with Dr Lawson Holman followed and, within hours, Jim and Norma Kieseey, the RFDS base operators, arrived to take the children to hospital. They came by road because Udialla had no airfield.<sup>22</sup>

In another whistle-triggered mercy dash, the Derby base chartered a light plane to collect a seriously ill fencer from Beverley Springs Station. The charter was required because, with the station's airfield unlicensed, the RFDS plane could not land there. With such service, it was not surprising that the Beverley Springs transceiver, like the one at Udialla, was considered a 'lifeline'.<sup>23</sup>

Both the RFDS and its staff are held in great esteem. The people who lived and worked at the Derby base (1955) included the Thorntons (1955 to 1961), the Kieseys (1961 to 1974), John and Margaret Stevens, and Charlie and Dot Prideaux. Other senior staff members occupied other RFDS-owned houses in Derby. In the later years, after a new residence was built behind the RFDS radio station (1955), it was usual for the radio operator or base administrator to live in that house while a pilot or another RFDS employee occupied the 1955 house.<sup>24</sup>

The Kimberley School of the Air is also held in high regard. After sharing the RFDS frequency from 1960, it received its own frequency in 1982. Student numbers fluctuate but, in 2003, the enrolment stood at seventy. Those students were among the last to use the RFDS radio system for their lessons. Future students will use a satellite-based computer system.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, pp. 66, 84, 119, 129, 138, 149 and 181.

<sup>21</sup> Ivan Rudolph, *Flynn's Outback Angels Volume II: Fulfilling The Vision, World War II to 2002*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 2002, pp. 172–3.

<sup>22</sup> Heseletine, *8 Whisky Charlie Victor*, pp. 96, 106–8 and 124–5.

<sup>23</sup> Marion Nixon, *Children In The Sun*, Marion Nixon Pty Ltd, Crawley (WA), 1995, pp. 2 and 49–50.

<sup>24</sup> Bilton, *Royal Flying Doctor Service*, p. 61; Marion Nixon, *The Rivers of Home: Frank Lacy — Kimberley Pioneer*, private publication, Perth, n.d., p. 108; Margaret Heseletine, conversation with Cathie Clement, 12 December 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Heseletine, *8 Whisky Charlie Victor*, pp. 65, 137–8 and 143; Heritage and Conservation Professionals in association with National Heritage, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley Municipal Inventory, prepared for the Shire, Derby, 1996, pp. 16–17; David McGonigal (ed.), *The Kimberley*, The Australian Geographic



The operative radio equipment dates from the early 1970s when changes occurred in radio frequency transmission band width throughout the world. Derby was the main radio base even though the Wyndham base (1950) remained open until 1990. Some of the radio equipment salvaged from the Wyndham base may now be at the Derby base (1955).<sup>26</sup>

In 1980, when a telephone interconnection service was added to the Derby equipment, the RFDS was able to connect stations to the national telephone network. By 1988, most stations had replaced their transceivers with microwave telephones. A decade later, optic fibre cable and Digital Mobile Base Stations replaced the microwave telephones. Notwithstanding those advances, the RFDS continues to provide some radio contact and monitoring.<sup>27</sup>

The familiarity that developed through radio contact led to many station people calling at the RFDS base (1955). Other visitors also dropped in, and, as early as 1965, the place was a tourist destination. Visitor numbers increased as the regional roads improved in the 1970s and early 1980s. A visitor centre was developed, and the town promoted the RFDS base and hangar as tourist attractions. By 1998, the displays in the radio station required an upgrade, and unannounced visits to the hangar were becoming a safety risk. At that time, the radio equipment at the base comprised the working model, a 1940s model that people hoped could be connected to the working model (for display purposes), a Traeger SSB50 in good condition, and other models.<sup>28</sup>

The planned upgrade of the RFDS visitor centre coincided with the decreased need for the RFDS to provide radio communications. It also coincided with planning for a relocation that would allow the RFDS office staff to work beside Aboriginal Health Service staff. That relocation occurred in April 2001 when the RFDS office staff moved from Clarendon Street to an office at 149 Loch Street.<sup>29</sup> The move reflected the increasing rate at which RFDS services are delivered, through clinics, to Indigenous people. Charter operators handle the flights for the clinics, leaving the RFDS aircraft free for emergencies.<sup>30</sup>

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* continues to be used by the RFDS. A pilot occupies the house. The radio equipment and furniture remain in the office.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* comprises the former RFDS office and adjacent RFDS residence, both built in 1955 and set in landscaped gardens,

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Society, Terrey Hills (NSW), 1990, p. 107, and revised edition, Australian Geographic Pty Ltd, Terrey Hills, 2003, pp. 68–9.

26 Heritage and Conservation Professionals, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley Municipal Inventory, p. 7; O'Brien Planning Consultants, Municipal Heritage Inventory, Place No. 45; McGonigal (ed.), *The Kimberley*, 1990, p. 104; Nigel Fisher, RFDS, Perth, conversation with Cathie Clement, 15 December 2004. The help of Peter Northover, RFDS, Perth, is also noted.

27 'Radio in the outback improved quality of life', display panel at RFDS Office, Loch Street, Derby; Heseltine, *8 Whisky Charlie Victor*, pp. 65–6; McGonigal (ed.), *The Kimberley*, 2003, p. 72.

28 RFDS (Victorian Section), Visitors' Book; RFDS, Derby, Base Refurbishment/1999, file, no page numbers.

29 Cheryl Russ, RFDS Office, Derby, conversation with Cathie Clement, 7 September 2004.

30 Daphne Choules Edinger, 'The Royal Flying Doctor Service in the Kimberley', *Boab Bulletin*, February 2000, p. 6. It is noted that the article constituted a summary of a talk presented Mr Peter Howe, the Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Western Operations, on 3 November 1999.

on a site that also contains remnants of the former radio transmission system. The GPS coordinates for the place are approximately 8086260N by 51 567404E.

Lot 519, containing *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* comprises an area of approximately 67m x 90m located on the southern side of Clarendon Street, to the east of the Derby District High School on the Clarendon and Fairbairn Streets intersection. To the south on Fairbairn Street a more recent residence has been constructed. This does not form part of the assessment. Clarendon Street in the vicinity of *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is a wide, tree lined street with a concrete pavement and verge of pindan and flowering street trees lined by mainly residential properties.

*Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office*, as viewed from Clarendon Street, resembles two domestic properties, each comprising a building in a landscaped garden setting. The office is located on the western side and the residence on the east, both addressing the street and set back approximately 15m inside the fence. Aerials and other remnants of the former radio equipment are located in the grounds of the former office. Both lots have wire mesh fencing approximately 1.8m high to the rear boundaries and the western boundary, and 1.2m to street boundaries. The two lots are separated by wire mesh fence 1.2m high with a 900mm wide gate located in line with to the two buildings.

The former RFDS office comprises a building approximately 17m x 9.3m located approximately 15m behind the Clarendon Street boundary, 21.5m from the western (school) boundary and 4.5m from the boundary with the adjacent residence. In front of the former office (north) a gravel driveway describes a curve in front of the building. There are two pairs of double gates 3.6m wide to Clarendon Street. A low fence along the street boundary contains a row of mature flowering trees and shrubs. Within the curve of the driveway the ground is the typical red earth or pindan and there are several mature flowering trees and a steel radio mast. A second mast is located 8m from the western boundary and 5m from the north boundary in the northwest corner of the site. Another mast is located in the southwest corner approximately 8m from the southern and the eastern fences. The backyard contains a number of other, smaller, mast and posts with wires and other equipment. The area is mainly pindan with medium sized shrubs and trees. There is a mature boob tree adjacent to the north-western corner of the former office.

The former RFDS office building comprises a single storey structure elevated above the ground approximately 1m on 150mm x 150mm concrete stump footings. Some additional steel supports have been added on the western side. The building is framed construction with walls clad with flat asbestos cement sheets painted a cream colour and a hipped roof clad with red painted corrugated galvanised iron. There are no gutters or downpipes. External timber trims including fascias, balustrades and timber window frames are painted green. The building has original timber window frames to the north (front), and south elevations and more recent aluminium framed windows to the side (east and west) elevations. The main entrance to the building is on the northern side and comprises a centrally located porch with a flight of six steps with a tubular steel handrail and a deck constructed of 75mm wide Jarrah floorboards. The porch is enclosed either side of the steps by glass louvers. There are two clear glass windows to the office and doors at either end of the porch. There is a brass plaque on the wall stating as follows:

This Radio Control Station was erected by the Royal Flying Doctor Service Australia (Victorian Section) with whom were associated the People of the Kimberley. Opened on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1955 by Her Excellency Lady Slim.

At the western end of the building there is a second timber porch, which is probably a later addition. It has a set of six steps with a tubular steel handrail, a floor of reeded decking and a door to the western room. There is an enclosed section to the east between this deck and the entrance porch that contains ablution facilities comprising a basin and a toilet.

Internally the building comprises five rooms generally extending the width of the building. The eastern room is L shaped with a smaller room (approximately 2.9m x 3.7m) enclosed on the southern side. The three western rooms are approximately the same size (approximately 3.2m x 7.4m). The room on the western end of the building is a former office and contains a sink. A sliding door provides access to the former radio room that still contains a bank of radio equipment along the centre taking up an area approximately 4.2m x .6m. There is a glazed panel in the wall of this room for viewing from the adjacent central room. There is a second glazed panel in the opposite wall. All the other rooms in the building were used as storage at the time of inspection in September 2004.

Internally the fabric of the office building comprises fibrous cement panels with timber battens to walls and ceilings. More recent walls have plastic strip battens. Doors are flush panel and floors are generally carpeted.

The site around the RFDS residence shows evidence of more extensive landscaping than is evident around the office. The building is located parallel to the former office, approximately 4.5m from the western site boundary and 21.5m from the Fairbairn Street boundary. The area in front of the residence (north) is enclosed by a 1.2m high cyclone mesh fence and features grass, pindan and shrubs. There is a mature date palm near the north-eastern corner. There is no direct access to Clarendon Street. The street access to the residence is from Fairbairn Street. There are double gates and a gravel driveway to a recent steel framed carport located to the south east of the building.

There is extensive recent planting of tropical species around the northern and eastern sides of the building. Behind the building, to the south is a brick paved courtyard with a hills hoist washing line. On the eastern side at the back of the residence is a fibrous cement sheet clad laundry that is likely to be contemporary with the original residence. On the western side is a large, recent galvanized iron clad shed.

The RFDS residence is similar to the former RFDS office. The residence is elevated approximately 1m above the ground on concrete stump footings with some additional steel supports. The building has been altered and extended over time. The external fabric is fibrous cement sheet clad with a hipped roof clad with zincalume. The front porch has been enclosed and forms part of the interior of the building. There is a front entrance accessed by a flight of timber steps with a timber handrail. There are two more flights of steps at the back of the house, one to the kitchen on the eastern side and the other on the west to the back of the bedroom wing. There is a covered courtyard area at the back of the house that opens onto the backyard. Original windows are timber framed with aluminium framed windows to more recent areas of the building. Windows have externally fixed mesh screens. There is a plaque on the northern (front) elevation of the building that reads:

This building was erected as the result of the generous donation of Mrs Janet Biddlecombe of Golf Hill Victoria and other supporters in Victoria. Opened on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1955 by Her Excellency Lady Slim.

Internally the residence is planned around a central core of rooms comprising a bedroom, bathroom with original fittings, toilet and storerooms. Around this core of rooms is a circulation space onto which the outer rooms of the building open. A living room on the eastern side opens onto the kitchen and a sitting room. A bedroom wing is located on the western side of the building. This comprises three bedrooms accessed from a corridor. The south-western bedroom has a recent ensuite bathroom. Internal walls are fibrous cement and fibrous plaster and floors are carpet or sheet vinyl.

The internal fabric of both the RFDS office and residence show evidence of having been upgraded in the past few years. In the 1990s the office was upgraded to allow for tours of the building. The residence has been extended to upgrade the level of accommodation provided. At the time of inspection (September 2004) the residence was still in use providing accommodation for RFDS staff. The office was not in use. Both buildings are in good condition.

### **13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION**

The Royal Flying Doctor Service is an operative national organisation with a number of places of similar function or purpose throughout Australia. Two other RFDS bases are listed on the HCWA database. Those places are: Place No. 07534, Royal Flying Doctor Service Base at Kalgoorlie; and Place No. 09590, Royal Flying Doctor Service Base at Wyndham. A third RFDS place, Place No. 11153, King Rocks Flying Doctor Service (also known as Meeking's Home; "King Rocks"), is also listed but it is not a comparative place. Each of the three places is listed in the Municipal Inventory for the shire in which it is situated.

The Wyndham base provides the best example of a comparative place. Like the Derby base, it was established by the Victorian Section of the RFDS and, with regard to extant buildings, the two places have a similar history. As the documentary evidence shows, however, the Wyndham residence and office occupy the second Wyndham site used by the service. The Derby and Wyndham bases are comparative places of similar function or purpose only in that both date from the 1950s and are associated with the provision of medical services and communications to people in the Kimberley. The place is linked to Place No: 04164, Wyndham Port Regional Prison (also known as Wyndham Port Hospital). That link, which is explained in the documentary evidence, occurs through the original Wyndham AAMS/FDS wireless station and quarters having been situated adjacent to the hospital.

A site visit was carried out to the former Royal Flying Doctor Service House and Office in Wyndham in September 2004. The Wyndham buildings remain extant, although not in use for their original purpose. At the time of inspection they were owned and used as a community centre by the Nganar - Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation. This facility was opened by Jim Lewis and Stan Davey on 25 October 1996. On the basis of visual inspection, the Wyndham buildings were constructed to the same design as Derby buildings but have not been altered or extended. The buildings were not inspected internally.

The heritage significance of *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office* is greater than that of Place No. 09590, Royal Flying Doctor Service Base, Wyndham, in that radio equipment is still in situ in the Derby office.

There are 11 places on the HCWA database noted as being constructed in the North West vernacular style. These are:

- 3357 *Dalgety House*, Cnr Anderson & Wedge Sts, Port Hedland, Pilbara region, 1901, RHP, Municipal Inventory
- Haynes Family Home, 84 Herbert St Cnr Louis Street, Broome, Kimberley region, 1910, Classified by the National Trust, Register of the National Estate
- 2343 *Mount Welcome House*, 109 Hampton Rd, Roebourne, Pilbara region, 1864, RHP, Classified by the National Trust, Municipal Inventory, Register of the National Estate
- 2332 *Holy Trinity Anglican Church*, Hampton St Roebourne, Roebourne, Pilbara region, 1895, RHP, Municipal Inventory, Classified by the National Trust, Register of the National Estate
- 2349 Whim Creek Pub, North West Coastal Hwy Whim Creek, Roebourne, Pilbara region, 1890, Municipal Inventory
- 691 *Wharfingers House*, Derby, Loch St, Derby-West Kimberley, Kimberley region, 1928, RHP, Municipal Inventory
- 294 *Old Police Lockup & Boab Tree*, 22 Carnarvon St Broome, Broome, Kimberley region, 1896, RHP, Municipal Inventory, Register of the National Estate, Classified by the National Trust
- 299 Pa Norman's House, 51 Louis St Cnr Walcott St, Broome, Kimberley region, 1910, Classified by the National Trust, Municipal Inventory, Register of the National Estate
- 3954 Marble Bar Hotel, Francis St Marble Bar East Pilbara, 1892, Municipal Inventory, HCWA assessment programme
- 8689 Watson and Tee Store, Sholl St, Roebourne, Pilbara region, 1888, Municipal Inventory.<sup>31</sup>

All of these places were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The latest construction, in 1928, is Wharfinger's House, Derby which, like *Royal Flying Doctor Service House & Office*, is a single storey, timber framed, weatherboard and asbestos residence. The building is rectangular in plan and is constructed on concrete stumps. The place was the site of the town's first Water Police Station and then, from 1928 to 1962, the site of the first quarters provided to house the succession of wharfingers responsible for management of port activities at Derby. The place is a good example of a residential building designed as a response to the extreme conditions of the tropical north of Western Australia.<sup>32</sup>

It appears from the HCWA database that most of these places are timber framed, display wide verandahs, shutters, are raised on concrete stumps and allow for cross ventilation.<sup>33</sup>

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31 HCWA database 10/5/05

32 *ibid.*

33 *ibid.*

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

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

Research should be undertaken to identify and catalogue the radio equipment in the RFDS office (1955). The heritage value of that equipment should then be ascertained by comparing it with the radio equipment that exists in, or has been salvaged from, other RFDS bases.

Research should also be undertaken to establish the whereabouts of, and the story behind, a set of small T-shaped markers that, until 1999, were in the grounds of the RFDS office (1955). It is believed that the plaques linked individual shrubs with RFDS supporters.