



**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)**

- 3.7.1 Establishing postal services

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

- 206 Mail services
- 404 Community services and utilities

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

*Red Post Boxes Group* is an example of decorative but functional cast iron work in public infrastructure. (Criterion 1.1)

#### **11.2 HISTORIC VALUE**

*Red Post Boxes Group* is indicative of the introduction of pre-payment of postage to Western Australia from 1854. (Criterion 2.1)

*Red Post Boxes Group* is indicative of the development of Western Australia's postal system, and its wide ranging network across the vast State. (Criterion 2.1)

*Red Post Boxes Group* demonstrates the once common practice of manufacturing post boxes in cast iron and is representative of the work of iron foundries that were once numerous across the State. (Criterion 2.4)

#### **11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

-----

#### **11.4 SOCIAL VALUE**

*Red Post Boxes Group* is valued by the local communities for providing postal services. (Criterion 4.1)

---

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Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

*Red Post Boxes Group* has social value as a reminder of the longevity of the postal service and of past times when it was central to communication in the State. (Criterion 4.1)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1. RARITY**

Brussels-style Post Box, Busselton is very rare as the only 'Brussels-style' post box extant in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

*Red Post Boxes Group* is rare as a collection of in-service cast iron post boxes. The majority of post boxes of this age and type are no longer used for postal services and/or are now located within heritage precincts or museum. (Criterion 5.1)

*Red Post Boxes Group* is rare as demonstrating the once common practice of manufacturing post boxes in cast iron. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Red Post Boxes Group* is representative of Western Australia's postal network. (Criterion 6.2)

### **12.3 CONDITION**

*Red Post Boxes Group* appears to be in good condition.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*Red Post Boxes Group* has high integrity as the post boxes continue to be used for their original purpose.

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Red Post Boxes Group* has high authenticity as the post boxes appear to be in their original state, with minimal alteration.

## **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by the State Heritage Office in February 2017, with amendments and/or additions by the State Heritage Office and the Register Committee.

### **13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

*Red Post Boxes Group* is a collection of four in-service decorative red cast iron pillar post boxes, comprising three hexagonal Penfolds style boxes and one Brussels style box, erected between 1876-1897, located at various sites across in Western Australia.

Within six months of the establishment of the Swan River Colony, a rudimentary postal system had been established, with the Harbour Master at Fremantle being appointed postmaster of the colony.<sup>2</sup> Predominately occupied with the management of mail incoming and outgoing by sea, letters could only be paid for at his office.<sup>3</sup>

As the population grew, post offices were established across the State, initially housed in the local postmaster's residential or business premises, and later in

---

<sup>2</sup> 'The Post Office in Western Australia During the First Fifty Years', by Captain Owen, in *Early Days being the Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society*, Vol V – Part 1 (1955), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Owen, George E., *The Postal History of Western Australia 1829-1901* (Melbourne: 1959), p. 2.

purpose-built post office buildings. Mail was carried by contract, on horseback or spring cart, or by native mail-carriers.<sup>4</sup> Mail routes were long, covering great distances to reach the scattered population, and expensive to maintain.<sup>5</sup> The high charge of postage resulted in colonists preferring to send mail via private agency rather than use the colonial postal service.<sup>6</sup>

In 1854, adhesive postage stamps were introduced to Western Australia, regulating the price and making prepayment of postage compulsory.<sup>7</sup> Prepaid postage facilitated the introduction and operation of post boxes - letter receivers located away from a post office or shop.<sup>8</sup>

First introduced in Great Britain in 1851/52 (in the Channel Islands)<sup>9</sup> and Australia in 1855/56 (at Circular Quay in Sydney),<sup>10</sup> Western Australia's first post boxes are thought to have been erected in Fremantle in 1868.<sup>11</sup>

These cast iron pillar post boxes were manufactured to a similar, but less decorative, design found in Great Britain at that time – the red hexagonal 'Penfold' design which was standard issue in Britain from 1866 to 1879.<sup>12</sup>

It is not known who manufactured these early boxes as there is no foundry mark on the surviving examples, however it is thought that they were made in Western Australia rather than being imported from Britain or the Eastern States.<sup>13</sup> Two 1868 pillar boxes survive in Western Australia, one on Stirling Highway in Claremont and one at Perth Zoo, however neither are in operation and neither are in their original location, and they are not included in this group.

It is presumed that post boxes were erected on an ad hoc basis, as no documentation has been found to support them being erected as part of an organised scheme. It appears that the post boxes were placed where demand dictated, in locations where the nearby population was not large enough to warrant a post office but which nevertheless generated enough post to warrant a box.

Although abandoned in Great Britain in 1879 following complaints that letters were becoming trapped in the hexagonal design, the 'Penfold' design appears to have been standard issue in Western Australia until the Commonwealth took control of the postal system following Federation in 1901.<sup>14</sup> Three of the four post boxes included as part of *Red Post Boxes Group* are of 'Penfold' design -

- VR 1876 Post Box, Bassendean
- VR 1894 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Railway Station
- VR 1897 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Hotel

---

4 Ibid., p. 4., and 'The Post Office in Western Australia During the First Fifty Years', by Captain Owen, in *Early Days*, Vol V – Part 1 (1955), p. 64.

5 Owen, George E., *The Postal History of Western Australia 1829-1901* (1959), p. 2.

6 Ibid., p. 5.

7 Ibid.

8 Farrugia, Jean Young, *The Letter Box: A History of Post Office Pillar and Wall Boxes* (Sussex, UK: 1969), p. 191.

9 Ibid., p. 25.

10 Ibid., p. 209.

11 'The Half-way Tree: A Memorial Pillar Box', *The West Australian*, 15 October 1936, p. 14. 'Pillar-Box', *The West Australian*, 19 November 1949, p. 24.

12 Farrugia, *The Letter Box* (1969), p. 50.

13 Hobson, Sue, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia: An Early History of the J & E Ledger Foundry* (2015), p. 14.

14 Farrugia, *The Letter Box* (1969), p. 51. Hobson, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia* (2015), pp. 41-44.

From 1891, all of Western Australia's pillar post boxes were manufactured by the J & E Ledger Foundry in Perth.<sup>15</sup> Both Kalgoorlie boxes were cast by the Ledger Foundry, however as the Bassendean box predates 1891, the manufacturer is unknown.

Each of the three 'Penfold' boxes display the royal cipher VR, for Victoria Regina (Latin for Queen Victoria), and the date of their manufacture.

The fourth box in the group - Brussels-style Post Box, Busselton – is a 'Brussels-style' design cast between c.1892 and 1897.<sup>16</sup> Much more ornate than the 'Penfold', the circular structure has an ornamental capital and base, and was considered superior 'in appearance and arrangement'.<sup>17</sup> This box was made in Pymont, New South Wales by W Taylor, Paragon Foundry.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the three 'Penfold' boxes, it does not display the royal cipher or date of manufacture. Letter receivers began to be used in Busselton from the mid-1890s.<sup>19</sup> It is not known whether the post box was first erected in Busselton after c1892, or whether it was erected at a later date (possibly having been in operation in New South Wales for a period). It is also possible that this post-box had been used in the town at a different location, then installed at its current location post-1959.<sup>20</sup>

From 1901, coinciding with Federation and the death of Queen Victoria, the design of Western Australia's pillar post boxes changed. Unlike the earlier 'Penfold' styled boxes, the new post boxes were not similar to other designs used in Britain. The overall shape of the new cylindrical box shared similarities with the 'Brussels-style' design, however it was much more restrained in decoration, having just the Royal Cipher and Swan emblem cast into its front. Between 1901 and 1909 the royal cipher ER for Edward Rex (King Edward VII) was used, followed by GR for George Rex (King George V) from 1910.<sup>21</sup> No ER or GR boxes are included as part of *Red Post Boxes Group*. None of the boxes from this period continue to be operational post boxes.

To date, no cast iron pillar post boxes manufactured after 1912 have been identified in Western Australia. It is unclear whether cast iron pillar box manufacturing ceased altogether after 1912, or whether later boxes just haven't been identified. It is probable that the development of new, cheaper materials, improved technologies and quicker manufacturing options contributed to the move away from cast iron boxes.

There is a significant lack of information about Western Australia's post boxes from 1912 to 2017. It is not known how the shape and design changed over time, or what materials or manufacturing processes were used.<sup>22</sup>

It appears that cast iron post boxes were slowly taken out of postal circulation in the twentieth century and removed from their original locations. In New South Wales, cast iron post boxes were frequently moved from one location to

---

15 Hobson, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia* (2015), pp. 11, 17.

16 Briggs, A. *Cast in Iron: New South Wales letter receivers*, 2013 in 'Busselton Letter Receiver'. by Hocking Heritage Studio, commissioned by City of Busselton, October 2017, p. 6  
William Taylor's Paragon Foundry operated in Sydney, NSW from the 1880s until at least 1914. Briggs, Adel, *Cast In Iron: New South Wales Letter Receivers* (2013) pp. 204, 205.

17 Farrugia, *The Letter Box* (1969), p. 206.

18 Briggs, *Cast In Iron* (2013), p.45.

19 'Busselton Letter Receiver'. by Hocking Heritage Studio, commissioned by City of Busselton, October 2017, p. 6

20 Aerial imagery for Busselton 1959, retrieved from Landgate in 'Busselton Letter Receiver'. by Hocking Heritage Studio, commissioned by City of Busselton, October 2017, p. 6

21 Hobson, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia* (2015), pp. 27, 31.

22 Emma Stevenson, Australia Post, conversation with Sian Ferraz, State Heritage Office, 18 January 2017.

another,<sup>23</sup> however they were decommissioned more significantly in the 1970s, due to the inconvenience of the low hanging access door, which caused the mail man to bend or kneel to clear them.<sup>24</sup>

In 2017, over 50 cast iron post boxes have been identified in Western Australia. All but the four included as part of *Red Post Boxes Group* are no longer in operation and have been relocated away from their original site.

All four post boxes included as part of *Red Post Boxes Group* appear to be in good condition, and are still used by Australia Post today (2017).

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Red Post Boxes Group*, a collection of three hexagonal Penfolds style boxes and one Brussels style cast iron pillar post boxes, which comprises:

- VR 1876 Post Box, Bassendean
- VR 1894 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Railway Station
- VR 1897 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Hotel
- Brussels-style Post Box, Busselton

*'Penfold' Post Boxes:*

*VR 1876 Post Box, Bassendean*

*VR 1894 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Railway Station*

*VR 1897 Post Box, Kalgoorlie Hotel*

Three of the four boxes in this group were manufactured as a less decorative version of the British 'Penfold' design, which had been standard issue in Britain from 1866 to 1879, and appears to have been standard issue in Western Australia until the Commonwealth took control of the postal system following Federation in 1901.<sup>25</sup>

These hexagonal post boxes are approximately 120cm (4ft) in height with a horizontal posting slot beneath a domed and cantilevered, projecting cap. Above the posting slot, the royal cipher - VR, for Victoria Regina (Latin for Queen Victoria) - and date of manufacture is cast. Below the posting slot, a locked rectangular door allows access to the interior.

The Kalgoorlie Hotel box is topped with a decorative finial, whereas the Bassendean and Kalgoorlie Railway Station boxes are not. It is unclear whether the earlier boxes were manufactured without finials or whether they were removed at some point. The Kalgoorlie Hotel box is also mounted onto a plinth, whereas the Bassendean and Kalgoorlie Railway Station boxes are not.

*Brussels-style Post Box, Busselton*

The Busselton post box is a 'Brussels-style' design, a circular structure with an onion shaped ornamental cap and decorative base. The posting slot sits beneath the projecting ornamental cap. A rectangular access door sits above the decorative base. Between the posting slot and the access door, the raised lettering 'POST BOX' wraps around the structure.

Unlike the three 'Penfold' boxes, it does not display the royal cipher or date of manufacture.

---

<sup>23</sup> Briggs, *Cast In Iron* (2013), pp 78, 79, 80, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>25</sup> Farrugia, *The Letter Box* (1969), pp. 50, 51

Cast in New South Wales, it is not known whether this post box was first erected in Busselton after c.1892 or whether it was erected at a later date (after having been in operation in New South Wales for a period).

All four post boxes appear to be in good condition, and are still used by Australia Post today (2017).

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Post receipt boxes located away from postal establishments were only possible after the invention and adoption of adhesive postage stamps, which enabled the pre-payment of postage.<sup>26</sup> This occurred in Britain in 1840, and reached Australia by 1850 and Western Australia by 1854.<sup>27</sup>

The design of Australia's first post boxes, in Sydney, were based on the 'Brussels-style' boxes found in Brussels and Paris, however, Western Australia opted for a more conservation design, adopting a restrained version of the British 'Penfold' design.

A 2015 study of cast iron post boxes in Western Australia identified 52 cast iron post boxes still extant across the State, of varying design, manufactured between 1868 and 1912.<sup>28</sup> Thirty seven are of 'Penfold' design, fourteen are post-1901 cylindrical, and one is 'Brussels-style'.

The vast majority (48 of 52) are no longer used for postal services and are now located within heritage precincts or museums.<sup>29</sup> The remaining four in-service cast iron pillar post boxes are included as part of *Red Post Boxes Group*.

No cast iron post boxes manufactured after 1912 have been identified, and no wider history of post boxes in Australia has been found as part of this assessment. As there is a significant lack in information about the history and development of Western Australia's post boxes from 1912 to 2017, it is difficult to determine the comparative significance of *Red Post Boxes Group* to other post boxes of other periods.

The above analysis suggests that the four post boxes included as *Red Post Boxes Group* are rare as cast iron post boxes still in operation. The post box in Busselton is particularly rare, as the only 'Brussels-style' post box identified in the State.

### 13.4 KEY REFERENCES

-----

### 13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research into the history and development of post boxes in Western Australia is required.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 191, 209., and Owen, *The Postal History of Western Australia 1829-1901* (1959), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Hobson, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia* (2015).

<sup>29</sup> Hobson, *Cast Iron Pillar Boxes of Western Australia* (2015), pp. 41-46.