



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

The aesthetic objectives of consistency of interior and exterior character, harmonious proportions and of a human scale compatible with the streetscape are evidenced in the design and additions. (Criterion 1.1)

The achievement of the aesthetic objectives is of a relatively high and uncommon design achievement. (Criterion 1.2)

The building has streetscape value. (Criteria 1.3)

The building particularly contributes to this precinct at its near location by the restatement of urbane street-space edges, and by the reinforcement of its street corner through its massing and symmetrical form about that corner. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

It contributes as an example of the banking class of buildings, and as one of those buildings of the Inter-War Stripped Classical extension of the free-Classical stylistic phenomenon, to an understanding of the diversity of cultural evolution of the State and its architecture. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The building exhibits such clarity in execution of the aesthetic agenda of the neo-Classical tradition as to constitute a teaching site and benchmark for assessment of the phenomenon in the State. (Criterion 3.1)

The building promotes an understanding of human occupation of the locality, in particular the development of the City block in which it sits as a consequence of the emerging presence of the Commonwealth of Australia. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The building is valued by the local community as evidenced by its listing in the local town planning scheme for cultural (aesthetic) associations. (Criterion 4.1)

The building is an essential component of a coherent precinct of streetscapes that engender the local community's sense of place and hence its sense of community cohesion. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The building exhibits a range of components and applications of the Classical language of architecture and in particular the twentieth century neo-Classical variety of the language as commonly applied to the small Australian regional bank from the between wars period. (Criterion 6.1)

It demonstrates the principal marketing characteristics of banking practice of emphasising solidity, reliability and permanence, expressed for a time through Classicism in this century, through the vehicle of branch bank architecture and symbolism. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

The current condition of the building is very good, architectural details, surface finishes and coatings being in an optimum state of repair and intactness.

The cumulative effects of management and environmental effects has been neutral in terms of the state of the fabric and very good in terms of ensuring the long term viability of conservation of the building.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The original function of banking offices is currently effectively maintained in the present non-specific office use, and the former banking chamber is accessible to the interested public as an office foyer in like function to that which prevailed when it was used in the banking function.

The long term sustainability of the aesthetic and other values is very high, subject to there being no incentive in the local town planning scheme for a higher and better use being obtainable through replacement of the structure, and subject rather to the provision of conservation incentives including expansion of floor space within the context of expansion of the existing structure in a conserved state.

There is no present imperative for any intervention in the existing fabric from the conservation point of view.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of the fabric is of a high degree in that the main two-storeyed section and its ground floor chamber and staircase are little disturbed whilst of principal interest to the cultural heritage significance, and other ancillary areas are harmoniously co-ordinated.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary and physical evidence has been compiled by Ian Molyneux, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence is scant, nevertheless the history of the place is relatively simple and cultural heritage significance is not reduced by that fact.

In 1901, federation of the Australian States led to the Commonwealth of Australia taking centralised responsibility for Posts and Telegraphs and with them the Post Office Savings Banks, leading to the formation of the national Commonwealth Bank of Australia, one of the flagships of the new, Federated nation state. Postal, telegraphic and telephone communications fell to the Post Master General's Department, the "P.M.G.".

The State Public Works Department of W.A. continued to design and build public works for the Commonwealth instrumentalities until about 1912.

Drawings for the construction of the Bunbury branch of the Commonwealth Bank were prepared in 1928 by the Commonwealth Department of Works, the supervising architect being one C.R Ross.¹

The new structure was developed on the corner of Stephen Street and the town's "main" street, Victoria Street, next to the Commonwealth P.M.G.'s new Bunbury Post Office facilities.

The former remarkable second old Post Office in Stephen Street (by the State's Public Works Department) was, tragically, later demolished along with the Anglican St. Paul's pro-cathedral on the corner of Stephen and Victoria Streets, demolished for its land value, all illustrating the move of commercial focus to Victoria Street as the sought-after business address in the Town of Bunbury.

In 1960, an extension was built to the design of Perth-based consulting architects Silver and Fairbrother.

A further extension was made to designs of the latter firm's successors, Silver and Goldberg, in 1970.

In c.1978, the building became part of the Bunbury Telecom facilities, successor to the PMG in telecommunications after its split-up into Australia Post and Telecom.

Subsequently the building was sold to the present owners and let out as offices.

The various stages of the building's growth are contiguous and united, leaving an open parking area at the west rear.

The current use is as offices for tenants including Ball & Co, Solicitors; Southern Staff Management; and State Parliamentary Offices (electoral offices) of Ian Osborne M.L.A (Member for Bunbury) and Barry House M.L.C.

¹ Data provided by the then Department of Administrative Services from their records to Ian Molyneux, c.1978.

(Member for the South West) through which it continues to evidence the strategic nature of the site for government instrumentalities in the City.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The physical evidence is of a building having the main authentic stylistic details of its origins in 1928, with subsequent additions and modifications only being revealed by the simpler details, and latterly by divergence from the neo-Classical style.

The siting is at the south-west corner of the intersection of the "main" street of Victoria Street and Stephen Street, the latter street block originally being the focus of the presence of the Local Authority, the Police, Customs and Local Courts, Post and Telegraphs, and of the establishment Church of England, from which only the Post and Telegraphs and the Church have since relocated.

Thus its siting was a significant strategic placement for a Government owned banker.

The building addresses the corner at which it is located by a truncated, main entrance focus between virtually symmetrical street facades, in the same formal mode as found in the later moderne Cronshaws Store, and it is a landmark reinforcing the southern fringe of a precinct of nineteenth to early twentieth century urban streetscapes that is focussed on the former railway station at Wellington Street.

The style of the bank is neo-Classical, in a minor version of the same house style used in a grander form in the State's main office at Forrest Place, Perth, and in the main national head office in Melbourne; the latter seen in the familiar "tin" money boxes issued by the Bank to generations of young "savers".

In this version the main Classical devices used are a low plinth supporting the pseudo-suggestion of a rusticated ground floor evoked by alternating recessed brick courses between flush-jointed brickwork, imitating large stone-block construction. Simplified string courses, cornices and parapet moldings define the first floor and roof-lines. The balconies are supported on simplified console brackets, and the windows are set within frames of simplified architraves with "key-stones". The windows are multi-paned in Georgian Classical fashion with "Union-Jack" pattern, Roman-Classical inspired fanlights.

A main, two-storeyed, balconied form at the street corner is supported at the Stephen Street side by a single-storeyed section detailed as for the main facades, and those facades that do not face the street, including simpler later additions, are un-adorned.

A late addition at the south side, entered from Victoria Street, is an unsympathetic space-frame and acrylic canopy to the staircase leading to the first floor.

The ground floor is occupied by the former banking chamber to the extent of the windowed street facades, and to the south and west of this chamber by lesser, ancillary rooms. The former banking chamber is latterly subdivided into two tenancies.

The south-east corner of the building is occupied by a separate entrance and staircase to the first floor.

The first floor is a single open area partitioned as offices.

The neo-Classical style of the exteriors is carried through into the interiors of the former banking chamber, in the coffering of the ceilings with encased beams, such beams, ceilings and window architraves decorated by simplified, Classically-derived moldings with molding blocks at their junctions in lieu of mitres.

The staircase incorporates a well detailed, geometric-patterned timber balustrade, and its window is glazed with a reduced Art Deco geometric leadlight design. It illustrates the common confusion and mixture of the contemporaneous Art Deco and neo-Classical styles (sharing geometric reductionism) in architecture of the period.

The first floor has been refurbished with inconsequential, but inoffensive, late suspended acoustic ceiling and partitioning and suggests no particular style-name.

The various alterations are minor and executed with seamless joints.to the original work.

The building is maintained in excellent condition.

13. 3 REFERENCES

Molyneux, Ian. *Bunbury National Estate Study 1978*. Nedlands 1978.