



# 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\*

*Old Council Offices* is a well executed example of the Federation Free Classical style, and has a visually appealing exterior. The elegant, high quality interior detailing is largely intact. (Criterion 1.1)

*Old Council Offices* has landmark qualities due to its corner location and the prominent palm trees which have become an important feature in this section of the streetscape. (Criterion 1.3)

*Old Council Offices* is an integral component of the Mends Street precinct that includes the Post Office, Police Station, the Windsor Hotel and the Old Mill Theatre (former Mechanics Institute). (Criterion 1.4)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Old Council Offices* has associations with the development of local government in South Perth and the development of the suburb of South Perth. (Criterion 2.1)

*Old Council Offices* reflect the attitudes of the period when Road Board Offices were considered to be significant public buildings and were seen as a public expression of civic pride. (Criterion 2.2)

*Old Council Offices* has close associations with local architect, Duncan Inverarity and local builder, Mr. F. Stidworthy. (Criterion 2.3)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*Old Council Offices* has social value through its past role as the venue for municipal activities. It was through discussions with rate payers that

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\* 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*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

Council re-assessed the role that the place had played in the City of South Perth and recognised its value to the history of the suburb. After a re-dedication service, celebrated nearly 100 years after the building's original dedication, and known as South Perth Heritage House, *Old Council Offices* now houses the local history collection and is used by local community groups. (Criterion 4.1)

The return of *Old Council Offices* as a public venue indicates that the place is highly regarded by the local community who recognise that the building embodies the evolution and development of suburban South Perth and contributes to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1. RARITY**

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### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Old Council Offices* is representative of an architectural style which was favoured by many West Australian local governments and state government departments during the gold boom period and as such is representative of Western Australia's increased prosperity at the turn of the century. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12.3 CONDITION**

*Old Council Offices* is in good condition, although it has some minor structural problems due to the age of the building and an ad hoc maintenance programme in previous years. A good maintenance programme is currently in place.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

Minor additions and alterations have been made to the building. However, the place is relatively intact and the internal layout of the building is still discernible. The place maintains the function of a civic building and as such is considered to have a high degree of integrity.

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

Although minor additions and alterations have been carried out to the place, many of them have been reversed or are reversible. The addition of a toilet at the southern end of the building has had minimal impact. *Old Council Offices* has retained a high degree of authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by students of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage: Leanne Bicknell, Yasmine McDonald, Marilyn Baker, Linda Rogalasky, Andrea McGellin and Geraldine Murdoch, under the direction of Andrea Witcomb and Fiona Bush. The physical evidence was compiled by Leanne Bicknell and edited by Fiona Bush. Additional research has been compiled by HCWA staff.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The history of South Perth has been continually shaped by its relationship with the Swan River and the locality's early isolation from the capital on the opposite shore. The area was first settled for industrial purposes in 1833 with the establishment of Shenton's Flour Mill. By the 1880s, communication with Perth had improved slightly with the introduction of ferry services and the construction of bridges across the Swan and Canning Rivers. As early as 1901, plans were drawn up for a bridge across the Narrows but it was not until nearly sixty years later that the bridge became a reality. Buoyed along by the gold boom, land facing Perth Waters was progressively subdivided between 1886 and 1904 and it was during this period that much of South Perth's infrastructure was constructed. Due to its continuing isolation, South Perth came to be seen as more of a 'retreat' from the city, surrounded as it was by dairies, market gardens and popular recreation areas such as the Zoological Gardens and Como Beach, which supplied social and leisure outlets for the citizens of Perth.<sup>1</sup>

In 1892, the South Perth Roads Board was established and by 1902 the suburb had become a Municipality.<sup>2</sup> Council meetings were initially held in various venues before until rooms were rented in the Mechanics' Institute building, which had been built in 1889.<sup>3</sup> As permanent venue was needed, Council approached the Mechanics' Institute with a view to purchasing their building.<sup>4</sup> However, a price could not be agreed on and the Institute withdrew its offer in October 1903.<sup>5</sup>

At the Council meeting held on 22 October 1903, Council resolved 'to build offices at once at a cost not exceeding £200'.<sup>6</sup> The Council Surveyor, local architect Duncan H. Inverarity, was asked to draw up plans and specifications which were submitted to Council in November 1903. However, the Council's requirements changed when they decided to move out of the Institute building and establish offices of their own.<sup>7</sup>

The Institute was a popular venue for billiard players who were apparently quite boisterous. Councillors found the noise distracting and requested that the billiard players absent themselves on Council nights. The request

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<sup>1</sup> Florey, C. *Peninsular City: a social history of South Perth*, The City of South Perth, 1995. p40-72.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>3</sup> Records of the South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council, Vol. 10, Minutes of Full Council meetings, 13.5.1902 - 31.3.1903.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 1, Minutes of Works Committee, 15.5.1903.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 10, Minutes of Full Council meeting, 6.10.1903.

<sup>6</sup> Florey, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

was ignored.<sup>8</sup> This impasse forced the Councillors to realise that the Institute was not suitable as a Council venue and new plans were called for. Duncan Inverarity, who was chosen by the Councillors from a ballot of local architects, was asked to prepare a new design. It is unclear what size building was called for. However, as Council had recently moved out of the Institute, it can only be assumed that a larger building was proposed. Mayoress A. B. Wright was quick to reassure worried rate payers that Council was only building offices rather than a Town Hall, as many rate payers were opposed to the chosen site.<sup>9</sup> The new offices were to be considered as a temporary measure until a more appropriate site for a civic centre could be found.

Tenders were finalised by 21 March 1904 with the lowest tender at £531/15 received from local builder, F. Stidworthy.<sup>10</sup> This amount far exceeded Council's earlier stipulation that costs were not to exceed £200. Councillors also learnt that the Government subsidy to assist with the construction of council offices would only amount to 20% of the total, rather than the £300 which had previously been anticipated.<sup>11</sup>

The foundation stone for the new building was laid on the 9 June 1904, by the Mayoress, Mrs Wright and the ceremony was described the following day in the *Morning Herald*. The article stated that the building would

be unpretentious in appearance.....until funds are available for the construction of a town-hall....The building will be of one storey, and will comprise a council chamber, a town-clerk's office, a mayor's parlor, and a contractor's room.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation laying ceremony was well attended by rate payers and dignitaries including the Colonial Secretary. The Colonial Secretary congratulated South Perth on their progress and likened the area to Sydney's North Shore.<sup>13</sup>

Six days later, Council decided to enlarge the building and called for tenders for the erection of a large room to be added to rear of the building already under construction. The cost was not to exceed £210. Stidworthy was the only tenderer at £210.<sup>14</sup> This additional central section was designed to be large enough to accommodate the Roads Board's long table.<sup>15</sup> It appears that the reporter for the *Herald* already knew of the plans to provide a council chamber in the new building. It also appears that no official opening was held to mark the building's completion as there were no further media statements. The first meeting recorded in the new building was held on 17 November 1904.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Records of the South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council, Vol. 10, Minutes of Full Council meeting, 24.5.1904.

<sup>9</sup> Florey, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Records of the South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council, Vol. 1, Minutes of Works Committee, 21.3.1904.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 10, Minutes of Full Council meeting, 29.03.1904 and 26.4.1904.

<sup>12</sup> *Morning Herald*, 10 June 1904.

<sup>13</sup> *Morning Herald*, 10 June 1904.

<sup>14</sup> Records of the South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council, Vol. 1, Minutes of Works Committee, 20.6.1904.

<sup>15</sup> Florey, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

In July 1913, Council purchased the Mechanics' Institute and renamed the building Mends Street Hall. The billiards tables were sold for £60 and the money was used to renovate the building.<sup>17</sup>

In March 1914, Council decided to install a strong room and after careful research employed the services Perth safemaker Bela Makutz. Makutz, a Hungarian migrant, operated a steel fabrication works in Coolgardie Street, East Perth.<sup>18</sup> Bennett Brothers won the tender for the construction of the strong room and Makutz supplied the door. The safe was installed at a cost of £44:7:6.<sup>19</sup>

Minor renovations were carried out by G. B. Puttlich & Son during World War I.<sup>20</sup> By the late 1920s staff numbers had increased to the point where a committee was formed to investigate the possibility of improving office accommodation. As a result, the Council Chamber was subdivided to accommodate two offices under one common roof.<sup>21</sup> These changes proved to be only a stop-gap measure and for many years the issue of inadequate space continued to be a problem. In May 1937, a tender of £296 was accepted from O. J. Sanderson for two additional rooms at the rear of the building.<sup>22</sup>

In the mid 1940s, flowerbeds were planted around the building and edged with jarrah boards.<sup>23</sup> An existing cypress pine hedge was replaced with ti-trees.<sup>24</sup>

In the years following the completion of the *Old Council Offices*, the issue of a new civic centre and more space had often been raised and then discarded as funds did not permit such a venture. By the 1950s, the *Old Council Offices* had become dilapidated and adequate office space was still a problem, even though Council also used rooms in the Mends Street Hall. Progress towards a new civic centre was finally made in 1959, the year South Perth became a City (1st July, 1959).<sup>25</sup> On the 23 May 1959, the foundation stone for a new civic centre in South Terrace was laid by the Mayor, Billy Thomas. The building was opened on 10 December 1960 by the Premier, David Brand.<sup>26</sup>

A special committee meeting was held in April 1959 to consider alternative uses for the *Old Council Offices* and the Mends Street Hall. Council decided to rent out the *Old Council Offices* and the premises were initially rented by a security firm until 1977, after which the building became a medical surgery. The change in tenant led to improvements

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> Records of the South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council, Vol. 12, Accounts submitted to Full Council meeting, 13.8.1914.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 13, Accounts General and Health, 25.7.1918.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 5, Minutes of Office Accommodation and Municipal Hall Committee meeting, 30.4.1929.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 25, Minutes of Special meeting of the Works and Finance Committee, 27.5.1937. A plan sketched in December 1937 shows the approximate layout of the building.

<sup>23</sup> South Perth Council minutes, 16.5.1945.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 2.2.1949.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 27.5.59.

<sup>26</sup> *The West Australian*, 12 December. 1960.

being made to the building such as the addition of a toilet at the rear and the whole building was painted and 'tuck-pointed'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1989, the City of South Perth was considering ways of marking the centenary of local government in South Perth, which was to occur in 1992. Also in 1989, the South Perth Historical Society was formed and one of their first resolutions was to propose the resumption of the *Old Council Offices* so that they could be used as a centre for historical research.<sup>28</sup> Extensive repairs were made to the floors, skirtings, walls and fan lights and existing partitions were removed.<sup>29</sup>

On the 7 June 1992, *Old Council Offices* was rededicated as South Perth Heritage House and a new memorial plaque was symbolically laid by Shirley Freeman, cousin of Mrs A. B. Wright. Ms Freeman used the same silver trowel Mrs Wright had used for laying the foundation stone. In 1998, building functions as a historical research centre for the local community and houses the Local Studies Collection, the City of South Perth Historical Society and the Old Mill Theatre's theatrical museum.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Old Council Offices* is a single storey brick building located to the north-east of the intersection of Mends Street and Millpoint Road, South Perth. The gable roof is clad with colour bond. The site lies within the group of historic buildings that includes the Windsor Hotel (1898), the former Mechanics Institute (1899), the Post Office (1900) and the Police Station (1908).

*Old Council Offices* were designed in the Federation Free Classical Style<sup>30</sup> The front facade has been painted red and tuck-pointed creating a dramatic red and white contrast. The bricks would originally have been left unpainted, and the tuck-pointing would have been applied lines of mortar, rather than the present painted lines. White painted cement rendered details further contrast with the red brickwork. These details include engaged piers, a balustrade parapet, a central pediment motif, label moulds and stringlines at sill and lintel height. Pairs of round headed arched windows are located either side of the recessed double front doors. The central door bay projects forward slightly from the window bays.

The rectangular building is composed of three separate parts: a front section which originally contained the Council Offices, a central section, which was originally the Council Chamber, and the rear section which was added in 1937.

The brickwork on the side elevations has also been painted and tuck-pointed. On the side and rear elevations the red surface area is broken by a plain rendered string line to the front and rear sections and by rendered window lintels in the central section. A single chimney with rendered

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<sup>27</sup> Letter to Gould from to the South Perth Council, 31.10.1977.

<sup>28</sup> Florey, *ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>29</sup> Internal Memo to Acting CEO, South Perth City Council, from Principal Building Surveyor, 16.4.1991.

<sup>30</sup> Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds P. *A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture: styles and terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1994, pp 104-107.

details remains on the east side. Double hung sash windows are located in the front and rear sections, while the central section has casement windows. Security grills have been placed on all of the windows except those in the front rooms which have security film. Air-conditioning units can be found on the west and east walls. Rising damp is visible at the bottom of the central section of the east wall.

The interior layout of the building has altered slightly from the original plans. The front section has only two rooms, whereas previously there was a central passage with a single room on the east side and two smaller rooms on the west side. These rooms were previously used as: the mayor's parlour, town clerk's office and contractor's room. The original layout is clearly visible from the remaining fabric; a section of the western passage wall has been removed as has the wall which once divided the western side of the building into two rooms. The previous dividing wall is clearly discernible from the remaining dropped beam in the ceiling. All of this section has plastered walls, cornices and ornate pressed metal ceilings with deep cornice mouldings and metal ceiling roses. There is a particularly fine pressed metal ceiling in the Mayor's parlour. The fireplace, which remains in the eastern room, has been bricked in. Timber floors are found throughout the building except in the strong room and the toilet, which have concrete floors.

The central section comprises a single large room with the strong room on the eastern side. The walls in this section have a timber dado with painted brickwork above. The suspended plaster ceiling with plaster ventilation grills is thought to have been installed in the 1930's.<sup>31</sup> The style of the cornice appears to belong to this period. The original cornice and open ceiling can still be seen in the space above the suspended ceiling. The original Roads Board Table is located in this room and is used by researchers.

The 1937 rear section is divided into two rooms. The walls are rough plastered to dado height (approximately 160cm) with smooth plaster above. The floorboards in this section are much narrower than those found in the front and middle sections.

The toilet is located at the rear of these two rooms. The walls are painted face brick; the concrete floor is covered with ceramic tiles. All fixtures are modern.

Most of the details in the front and central sections point to a construction period at the turn of the century. Joinery details are original with the exception of the casement windows in the central section, they would appear to belong to the 1930s when the two rear rooms were added. Details in the two rear rooms indicate a construction period set in the 1930s. New fittings and fixtures have been installed which are appropriate to the period of the building.

Much of the surrounding garden has been replanted, although elements of original plantings still remain. On the eastern side of the building these include three palm trees, which have become a local landmark, and a very

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<sup>31</sup> Aris, K. 'Conservation Plan of Heritage House', unpublished report, 1996, p.23.  
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large dragon tree. There are several mature trees on the western side. Garden beds which are planted near the walls of the building are recent.

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

South Perth Road Board and Municipal Council Minutes, various volumes.

### **13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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