



HERITAGE
COUNCIL
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No** 1291
2. **Name** Government Buildings, Kalgoorlie (1896-1899)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry** Block of two storey buildings including large central building surmounted by a clock tower, and the land on which they stand being Kalgoorlie Lots 62, 63 & 64 on OP Kalgoorlie 77 (comprised in C/T 1228/610), and lot 65 (vacant Crown land).
4. **Local Government Area** City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
5. **Location** 208-210 Hannan Street, Kalgoorlie
Lot Kal 62, 63, 64 OP Kalgoorlie 77 C/T 1228/610
Lot 65 Vacant Crown Land
6. **Owner** Joint ownership of State Government and Australia Post.
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Communication with the outside world was a very important issue for the great number of people who flocked to the Kalgoorlie area, after the discovery of gold in 1892/93. As a result there was a pressing need for a postal service. After the appointment of a temporary Postmaster, the first official mail was received on 11 February, 1894.¹ The volume of mail steadily increased, to such an extent that the postmaster refused to continue work, unless he received additional help and a temporary post office. The post office was built out of poles and filter cloth, over a weekend. Such was the growth of business that by November 1895 the postal staff had reached 14 and a new building was urgently required.

With the advent of the railway to the goldfields reaching Kalgoorlie in September 1896, and consequently cheaper freight, hessian buildings rapidly gave way to buildings of corrugated iron ones, and, in some instances, stone, which was quarried locally. The much needed additional Post Office was built of galvanised iron. It was commenced on 8 July 1896 and completed by 19 August of the same year by the builders Philip and Royle, at a cost of £708.5.0. However, by 1897 there was growing agitation for the provision of more suitable accommodation for the growing postal requirements of the community and the increasing number of public officers, who served Kalgoorlie and the surrounding area. Coincidentally, the Public Works Department was taking steps to establish a permanent office in Kalgoorlie. The

¹ Department of Works, Kalgoorlie Post Office: An Historical Report, Commonwealth Department of Works, Perth Branch, July 1969.

following report on the progress of design work was included in the Architects report of the Public Works Department Annual Report. "Kalgoorlie Public Buildings: This block is proposed to face Hannan Street, and will comprise the Wardens Court and Offices, offices of the principal officials and branches of the Mines Department, the Courts of Justice, and a large Central Post and Telegraph Office. The Building, as designed, will be the largest and finest of the buildings so far erected on the Goldfields of the Colony. The working plans are approaching completion."² It was proposed to construct the building on lots 62, 63, 64, 65 and 66.

Local newspapers reported with eager anticipation all stages of the construction of the building. "Mr Grainger, the Architect-in-Chief, and officers of his staff have arrived in Kalgoorlie to act in connection with the work, which is to be put into hand at once. It will be a fine block of buildings..."³

A report in the Kalgoorlie Miner, dated 7 May 1898, described the new civic buildings as follows: "Kalgoorlie's New Public Buildings - In view of the fact that work is now started on the erection of the delayed public buildings for Kalgoorlie, the tender of Messrs. Couston and Finlayson for £22,000 having been accepted a couple of days ago, some particulars of what is going to be done will be of interest. Anything like a full statement of the architectural details would require too much space, but the main features may be told of. The block of two storey buildings is to be located on the space alongside the Miner's Institute and to the front of the present wood and iron Government offices. They will be right on the edge of the footpath line and will have a total frontage of 261 feet, with a clock tower 110 feet high to the top of the dome in the centre. The Post and Telegraph departments will occupy the right hand half. The front, along the whole length of the building, will be arcaded, the supports being round colonnades, and facing the street under the arcade of the Post Office half, will be the usual letter and parcel receiving boxes. The main entrance will terminate in a postal hall, 59ft.6in. by 25ft, and 21ft high, around which are money order clerks' and other offices. A kiosk, where stamps are to be had, will be located in the middle of the postal hall, which will be well lighted by windows at the upper part of the walls. To the left of the 10ft wide hallway will be a 53ft x 25ft sorting-room, with private letter boxes in front. The postmaster will have his quarters, or a considerable part of them, on the ground floor, also his and his clerk's offices. There will be a separate entrance from the street to the Savings Bank, which will be a separate division and comprise, besides the public business apartments, several clerks' rooms. The upstairs portion of the right half of the long building will be occupied by the telegraph and telephone divisions. The telegraph operating room will be the chief one and the Telephone Exchange will be next in importance. There will be battery, clerk's, lavatories, cloak rooms, etc ranged around the space occupied by the upper part of the postal hall, the roof of which will be of the same height as the rest of the building, in order that direct light may be given to every room. ...A feature of the buildings, which are to be fairly elaborate in the way of exterior appearance, will be tile roofs. It must be mentioned that there is to be a big underground tank for water, with a holding capacity of 18,000 gallons, while there will also be tanks on the roofs, with piping attached and hose ready for use in case of fire."⁴

Soon after this report appeared, work commenced on the building. The footings were of concrete, and the external faces and colonnades in local freestone and granite quarried locally at the Ashlar Quarry.⁵ The progress of the construction is reported in the Western Argus in September 1898: "Very good progress has been made by the contractors, Messrs Couston and Finlayson, with the Kalgoorlie Public Buildings. The brick and stone portion of the first half - the Post Office section - has been completed, and the carpenters are now working at the roof timber. It is expected that this section will be ready for occupation in four weeks hence. The foundation work has started for the other half - the Warden's Court section - and preparations are being made for the erection of the superstructure of the big clock tower. About 40 men are now engaged on the work, and under the skilful direction of Mr. Finlayson and Mr D. Fraser, the foreman, with the assistance of Mr. Cottrell, the clerk, the labor is being done to the best advantage and well. Mr Phair, the Government supervisor, is always in evidence too. All connected

² ibid., p.6

³ Western Argus, 12 May 1898, p.20

⁴ Kalgoorlie Miner, 7 May, 1898

⁵ Department of Works, Kalgoorlie Post Office: An Historical Report, p.11

with the buildings seem to take a pride in their work. For the hauling of material to the upper parts of the big structure an engine is used."⁶

The Post Office wing was completed in January 1899 and the postal and telegraph staff were transferred into the new building in February 1899. Not long after, electric light was installed. Meanwhile, the old post office building was demolished and the east wing of the building constructed. The court chamber in the Warden's Court section of the Government Buildings was used for the first time on 25 September, 1899.⁷ Later, on the 9 October 1899, a group of distinguished gentlemen assembled at the new Courthouse, at the invitation of the Warden, to celebrate the official opening of the buildings.⁸

The tower and clock are of particular note. The tower, rising 100ft above the pavement, is an excellent example of the masons' skill, and serves as a city landmark, as well as housing 8 water tanks for fighting fires. The Premier, Sir John Forrest, who attended the Coolgardie Exhibition on 30 March 1899, also paid a visit to Kalgoorlie. During this visit the Premier promised a clock for the tower. The Western Argus, of 13 April 1899, published a photograph of the laying of the last brick of the tower. The value of the tower as an observation point was quickly realised and the newspaper published a series of photographs of Kalgoorlie taken from the top of the tower.⁹ There was a delay of several months before the clock was installed and in the meantime the four gaping faces were used by sightseers as a lookout. The town clock, provided by the State Government, was formally started on 11 August 1900 by the Resident Magistrate, J. M. Finnerty.¹⁰ After a 15 months construction period and a further wait of 11 months for the clock, the Government Buildings were finally complete.

The building, apart from its massive size and scale, has a civic grandeur that is rare in Western Australia. It is a fine example of Grainger's architecture. During the period of construction of the Government Buildings, Kalgoorlie was the scene of much building activity. "In addition to the speedily progressing work in connection with the Public Buildings in Hannan-street, there is much activity at the eastern end of the street... Occasional visitors to Kalgoorlie do not fail in finding cause from time to time for expressions of approval at the steadily progressive improvement of the architecture of the town."¹¹

In March 1901, the postal service in Western Australia was officially taken over by the Commonwealth Government. Henceforth, the Post and Telegraph Office portion of the Public Building in Kalgoorlie was Commonwealth owned. During WWII, some of the rooms on the first floor west end were used by the Australian Broadcasting Commission as a wireless station, but generally the building continues to be used for the purpose for which it was built.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

A building report (1969) indicates that the interior of the building has had no major structural alterations, although there has been a number of minor alteration.¹² The

⁶ Western Argus, 22 September 1898, p.20

⁷ Western Argus, 28 September 1899, p.20

⁸ Western Argus, 12 October 1899, p.20

⁹ Western Argus, 27 April 1899, p.12

¹⁰ Western Argus, 16 August 1900, p.15

¹¹ Western Argus, 18 May 1899, p.20

¹² Department of Works, Kalgoorlie Post Office: An Historical Report, 1969

Conservation Plan (1993) provides a more detailed statement on changes to the building fabric, and its condition.

A major visual alteration concerns the cladding of the roof. The roof of the front elevation and ends of the main part of the building was originally clad with slate and the remainder being clad with corrugated iron. However, the slate roofing was replaced during the 1930s with galvanised iron. In 1958, when the building underwent maintenance, the roof originally covered by slates was re-laid with clay tiles, restoring some of the building's old character. The building was renovated again in 1965 at a cost of £20,274. During this building programme, the remainder of the main part of the building still covered with galvanised iron was laid with tiles to match those put on in

1958.

Several changes which took place are set out in the Conservation Plan, and include:

- 1905 - Enclosing a section of the ground floor rear and erecting and modifying toilets on the rear first floor verandah;
- 1911 - Enlarging the front section to include a portion of the ground floor arcade to form a Banking Chamber with court access shifted to the side door. A section of the rear office was extended and a section of the ground floor walkway enclosed as for 1905;
- post war - Additional facilities erected on the first floor and the ground floor area converted to toilets. Suspended ceilings to most areas and air-conditioning units installed.¹³

The some structural damage to the building occurred in November 1992 when a car mounted the footpath and demolished a column and two adjacent arches of the arcade. However, these elements have since been rebuilt.

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.

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

The massive scale and grandeur of the Government Buildings is of aesthetic importance to the goldfields community

The building is a fine example of J.H.Grainger's architectural skill in handling mass, scale and detail in a large Italianate civic building.

The Government Buildings, centrally located on Hannan Street, has ensured the building became an integral part of the townscape. The clock tower is a recognised Kalgoorlie landmark.

¹³ For additional detail refer to the Conservation Plan.

2. HISTORIC VALUE

The functions of the Government Buildings were directly associated with mining activities, therefore the building is a constant reminder of the history of the town's foundation

The Government Buildings was the first major public building erected in Kalgoorlie. It was an important confirmation of the permanence of the mining town.

Prominent persons associated with the construction of the building include the Premier Sir John Forrest; mining warden J.M.Finnerty; and government architect J.H.Grainger.

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

4. SOCIAL VALUE

The massive scale of the Government Buildings, incorporating postal services, telecommunications and a miners court, demonstrates the State's recognition of the importance of the Kalgoorlie goldfields in the economic development of Western Australia, at the turn of the century.

The building is widely recognised in Western Australia as being associated with Kalgoorlie.

The social significance of the Government Buildings was nationally recognised in 1992, when Australia Post featured the building as part of a set of four stamps celebrating the centenary of the discovery of the West Australian goldfields.

5. RARITY

The Government Buildings is the largest public building constructed outside the metropolitan area.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The Government Buildings in Kalgoorlie is a representative example of the extensive public buildings program undertaken by the State Government in goldfield localities such as Coolgardie, Cue, Kalgoorlie and Leonora.

CONDITION

A detailed description of the condition of the external and internal fabric of the building is included in the Conservation Plan (1993) prepared for the Building Management Authority.¹⁴

¹⁴ Broomfield, W. Kalgoorlie Public Buildings: Conservation Plan, for the Building Management Authority, 1992, pp.17-22

In brief, the masonry is generally in good condition. Apart from the inevitable minor cracks, the render sections and embellishments of the facade are sound. Apart from damage caused by dropping mortar from stone patching the tiled roof is in good condition. Internally there are few problems. The floors, plaster, joinery, paintwork and ceilings are in good condition. Where visible the original ripple iron ceilings appear sound with no rust or deterioration. Much of the ceiling has been overlaid with suspended plasterboard to conceal duct work above.

INTEGRITY

The building generally continues to be used for the purposes for which it was designed, and thus the integrity of the building is high.

AUTHENTICITY

Very few, if any, of the original fittings and furniture remain. However, despite changes in the Government Offices occupying the building the main fabric has been respected and the few changes integrated into the facade. The degree of authenticity is high.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Government Buildings, Kalgoorlie, has considerable cultural significance which is reflected in:

- the external architectural grandeur of the building, rarely found outside the metropolitan area

- its strong contribution to the visual character of Hannan Street,

- the building being a fine example of J.H.Grainger's architectural skills

- its close association with the early development of Kalgoorlie, and the eastern goldfields,

- its association with prominent historic persons, including Sir John Forrest (premier), J.M.Finnerty (mining warden) and J.H.Grainger (government architect).

- its local, state and national recognition as a landmark associated with Kalgoorlie, and the eastern goldfields.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry	18/09/1992
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Permanent Entry	20/09/1993
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9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

Department of Works, Kalgoorlie Post Office: An Historical Report, Commonwealth Department of Works, Perth Branch, July 1969.

Western Argus, 12 May 1898, p.20

Kalgoorlie Miner, 7 May, 1898

Western Argus, 22 September 1898, p.20

Western Argus, 28 September 1899, p.20

Western Argus, 12 October 1899, p.20

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Broomfield, W., Kalgoorlie Public Buildings: Conservation Plan, for the Building Management Authority, 1992, pp.17-22