



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

Lawson Flats is a fine example of Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style. (Criterion 1.1)

The lofty stature of the double palazzi, rising from the three storey base, is a city landmark. The massive, grand form of the building also makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Sherwood Court and The Esplanade. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Lawson Flats, which incorporates a restaurant and club facilities, is the grandest of the apartment buildings constructed in the central city in the late 1930s, and demonstrates the interest in apartment housing in the Inter-War years. (Criterion 2.1)

Together with the adjacent *C. M. L. Building* (demolished in 1980), *Lawson Flats* demonstrated a resurgence in city building activity in the late 1930s, as the Western Australian economy recovered from the Great Depression. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Since its opening in 1937 *Lawson Flats* has been the residence of a number of prominent the community's image of the place as being an apartment block somewhat out of the ordinary. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Lawson Flats is a rare example in Perth of a late 1930s, multi-storey, inner-city residential development. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Lawson Flats is representative of the various types of buildings, in particular apartments, constructed during the building revival in Perth in the late 1930s, following the Great Depression. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

The building has had an ongoing program of maintenance, and is in good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The building continues to be used for purposes for which it was built, being residential apartment accommodation, restaurant and prestigious club. *Lawson Flats* retains a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Minor alterations to the building fabric of the interior of the Karrakatta Club has occurred; however, the majority of the modernisations of the interior carried out in 1987, has had relatively minor impact on the fabric of the building. Minor upgrading to the remainder of the interior has occurred. The building retains original external and internal detailing and, therefore, retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Lawson Flats is an eleven-storey building located on the southern end of Sherwood Court and the Esplanade, constructed in 1937, by the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society. It was built as a companion piece to the nearby *C.M.L. Building* (1936, demolished in 1980), located at the northern end of Sherwood Court and St Georges Terrace. The *C.M.L. Building* was used by Colonial Mutual as an office building. It was stated in the *Daily News* that *Lawson Flats* was, '... to be Perth's first block of flats built on similarly extensive lines to those which are prominent features of the Eastern States capitals.'¹

The construction of *Lawson Flats* was a key part of an intensive building program which signalled that the building industry in Perth had recovered from the economic depression in the first half of the 1930s. The *West Australian*, reporting on the growth, noted that:

The greatly increased expenditure in the building industry has been of widespread benefit. Not only has it provided employment to practically all the tradesmen in that industry, but it has given much work to all other sections of the community. Building concerns are showing confidence and many are either expanding their premises or erecting new buildings, while private residences are being built at the rate of from 130 to 150 a month.²

Other buildings constructed in Perth at this time include; *London Court* (1936-37), *Piccadilly den Building* (1935-38), *King Edward Memorial Hospital* (1939), *Royal WA Institute for the Blind* (1937), *Criterion Hotel* (1937), *Como Theatre* (1938) and the *Emu Brewery* (1936).

Plans for *Lawson Flats* were prepared by Melbourne architects Hennessy, Hennessy and Company, in association with Perth architect Reginald Summerhayes. Mr Summerhayes was born in Perth and studied at the University of Western Australia. After military service, he returned to Perth in 1926, to join his father in E. Summerhayes & Son. He won several architectural awards and was an active member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA Chapter).³

Construction of the building was carried out by Concrete Construction (W.A.) Ltd. The site sloped sharply towards The Esplanade and extensive excavation work which started in November 1936, was complete in six weeks. During the construction of *Lawson Flats*, the architects made a feature of utilising local labour and Australian-made products, the majority of which were also Western Australian. The construction of *Lawson Flats* employed an average of 100 men and the building was completed in eleven months.⁴

The building comprised a restaurant, common laundry and caretaker's flat on the ground floor. The Perth Club, which had previously occupied premises at the rear of the *C.M.L. Building*, occupied the entire first and second floors,

¹ *Daily News* 25 September 1937, p. 10.

² *West Australian* 30 September 1937, p. 12.

³ Erickson, R., *Dictionary of Western Australians* Vol. 5 (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1986) p. 878.

⁴ *Building and Construction* 1 October 1937, p. 3.

as well as a small section of the ground floor. The Perth Club, formed in 1840, and conducted in a number of locations in central Perth, prior to the construction of *Lawson Flats*, was a private men's club which catered for professionals and men in commerce.⁵ The Perth Club was rivalled in status by the Weld Club, located in close proximity, on the corner of The Esplanade and Barrack Street, which was patronised by members of the colonial gentry and Government officials of high social standing.⁶ The club facilitates within *Lawson Flats*, are now occupied by the Karrakatta Club, a private women's club, which moved to the Esplanade location, late in 1984, following the sale of its former club premises on St George's Terrace. The Karrakatta Club, the first of its type in Western Australia, was established in 1894, by a small group of elite and influential women. Its main objective was to provide a forum for women interested in self-education and social interaction.⁷

The third to tenth floors of *Lawson Flats* were designed as residential flats, each serviced by the most modern of conveniences.

Each floor of flats provides a series of four residential apartments. Each apartment or flat has modern equipment and is wired for a telephone. It has modern aids - gas stoves and electric power points - a refrigerator and a Kernerator.⁸

The colour scheme of the building also received particular mention:

Each floor of flats has its particular colour scheme. On one floor the prevailing colour scheme is blue. Another is green and another has cream as the main colour. Walls of the flats are papered. The colours of the paper harmonise with the prevailing colour scheme, on that particular floor. In general, restrained effects have been secured.⁹

At the time of opening, *Lawson Flats* made a notable contribution to the Perth skyline:

The new apartment building just completed for the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society Ltd, has caused a further change in Perth's skyline. Situated at the corner of The Esplanade and Sherwood Court this new building provides one of the most conspicuous features in Perth architecture.¹⁰

Since 1937, *Lawson Flats* has been used continuously for residential purposes. A number of prominent people have resided there including: Sir Hal Colebatch, MLC; Sir Maxwell Wedderburn; the Vice-Consul of the USA, C. O. Thompson; Air Commander R. J. Brownell; Mr H. B. Jackson, QC; Mr Richard Trethowan; Mr Carew Reid; Mr A. J. Monger; and Mr G. Drake-Brockman.¹¹ Individual apartments within *Lawson Flats* have also been used by government departments, including the Premiers Department, Treasury and the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy.¹²

⁵ Stannage, C., T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City* (Perth City Council, Perth, 1979) p. 76.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁷ Moffat, J., 'Karrakatta Club, 1894-1901' (unpublished Honours dissertation, Murdoch University, 1994) p. 3.

⁸ *Daily News* 25 September 1937, p. 10. A Kernerator is an incineration system.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *Building and Construction* 1 October 1937, p. 3.

¹¹ Wises Postal Directories 1940 to 1949 - the mix of tenants remains similar today.

¹² The use by the Premiers Department and Treasury was while Colebatch was Premier.

In November 1984, the building was offered for sale for approximately \$2.5 million.¹³ At the time there was a restaurant on the ground floor, while the club rooms on the first two floors were vacant. The remaining eight floors comprised the original residential apartments.

In 1986, Gary Jones, a Perth developer, bought *Lawson Flats* from Colonial Mutual.¹⁴ He renovated the apartments and, in 1987, offered them for sale on a strata-title basis. The 32 apartments were sold in seven days for a total of \$7 million.

Lawson Flats continues to be used as a residential apartment building, incorporating Luis Restaurant and the Karrakatta Club. The place has, more recently, been associated with entrepreneurs and a number of the apartments have been leased out to short term, rather than long term tenants. In March 1995, the Perth City Council approved an application for eleven of the apartments to be used as serviced apartments. These apartments are used for short term residential and business tourism purposes.¹⁵

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Lawson Flats is an eleven-storey building of the Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style,¹⁶ sited on the north-east corner of the intersection of Sherwood Court and The Esplanade.

The tall building addresses both streets; however, its principal facade and the entrance to the foyer of the residential apartments is on Sherwood Court. *Lawson Flats* (1937), together with the adjacent *Atlas Building* (1930) and *Weld Club* (1892), form the oldest and largest collection of grand buildings in the streetscape of The Esplanade.

Lawson Flats is constructed of reinforced concrete and has a coloured cement render exterior, which resembles ashlar stonework.¹⁷

The building is divided into double palazzi with chamfered corners, a vertically extended reinterpretation of an Italian Renaissance palazzo facade, that sits on a three-storey base.

The repetitive residential floors are given simple treatment. The walls are plain, however the slightly recessed small metal framed rectangular windows and moulded spandrels provide the building a vertical emphasis, that is broken only by a moulded frieze above the three storey base, above the ninth floor and at the parapet which is decoratively capped with a short, pitched tiled roof that conceals a flat roof behind. Shadowed recessed balconies emphasise the building's corner truncation, and the south elevation. The balcony openings feature some corbelling in the shape of fairly flat archways.

¹³ WA *Business World* November 1984, p. 15.

¹⁴ *Sunday Times* 9 August 1987, p. 7.

¹⁵ The development approval is dated 14 March 1995. The lessee is Leasing Elite of West Perth.

¹⁶ 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) pp. 168-171.

¹⁷ *Building and Construction* 1 October 1937, pp. 3-6.

The three-storey base of the Sherwood Court facade is symmetrically disposed about the principal residential entrance. A frieze of simple ornamentation, that continues around the building, delineates the top of the base. The position of the residential entrance is emphasised by a heraldic shield, pediment and decoratively tiled parapet, in a style that is more "spanish mission" than "italian renaissance". At street level the entrance is protected by a canvas awning, and flanked by ornamental metal lanterns. The timber entrance doors are believed to be original that have been refurbished.¹⁸ Decorative wrought iron, which adds a domestic character to the building, is used to protect lower windows and to decorate internal doors.

Floors three to ten each comprise four flats, arranged in pairs either side of a central core. Two flats are orientated towards The Esplanade, with the balcony of the corner flat at the building's truncation. The other two flats have balconies on the northern side of the building. The original communal laundry was on the roof as was typical.

The central core comprises two lift shafts, stairs and cleaner's cupboard. There is a light well east and west of the core. Physical evidence remains of small openings on the walls beside the entrance to all residential units. The openings possibly formed serveries as the kitchens are located directly behind the passage walls.¹⁹

The Karrakatta Club (formerly the premises of the Perth Club), shares the ground floor with Luis Restaurant, has use of much of the basement, and occupies the entire first and second floors. The Club has a separate entrance off Sherwood Court and an entrance off the lane on the northern side of the building. Luis Restaurant also has a separate entrance off The Esplanade.

The original entrance to Luis Restaurant, of double glazed doors, was off the building's lobby. In 1986, the doors were removed and the opening reduced to form a private entrance. Physical evidence remains of another entrance at the building's truncation, now displaying Luis' menu. The doorway formed a secondary entrance to the restaurant (Lawson Tea Rooms and Coffee Lounge) which was created in the early 1960s to conform with liquor licensing requirements, and bricked-up in 1986. The main entrance to Luis Restaurant, originally formed the second entrance to Lawson Flats. A passage led from the doors to the stairs and lift lobby. The passage, at the lobby, was blocked in 1986, and the passage become part of Luis Restaurant. The owners of the restaurant remodelled the area to accommodate a kitchen, toilets and cellar. The additional space made vacant from relocating the kitchen formed an extended dining area.²⁰

The building has undergone a program of maintenance over the years and is in good condition. In 1986, the Karrakatta Club modernised their interior. The alterations were designed by Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown, Architects. The works involved alterations that have relatively minor impact on the interior fabric of the building. The works included: the creation of a new lift shaft from the ground floor to the second floor, in an under utilised area; the removal of part walls in the storage areas on the ground floor; the installation

¹⁸ Conversation with Lewis Richards, Luis Restaurant, 28 March, 1995.

¹⁹ The openings were probably bricked-up in 1986, during the building's refurbishment.

²⁰ Conversation with Lewis Richards.

of a new ceilings, lighting, cornices, and air conditioning; upgrading the amenities; and reducing storage space on the ground floor level, marginally enlarging the lobby.²¹

In 1987, the main entry foyer and corridors on floors three to ten were upgraded. Upgrading of the foyer continued in 1990/91, and included installation of new lighting and floor coverings.

13.3 REFERENCES

Building and Construction, 1 October 1937, pp. 3-6

National Trust Assessment Exposition, February 1981.

²¹ See file P2092, Heritage Council of Western Australia, for Drawing Nos. A1, A2 and A3.