



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

The place is a good example of a Federation Free Classical purpose built post office, despite subsequent alterations and additions. (Criterion 1.1)

It makes a significant contribution to the streetscape in an historic town which contains many fine late nineteenth century and early twentieth century buildings retaining much of the ambiance of a pre World War One town. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

It is significant in the development of Bridgetown and the surrounding district. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

It is highly valued for its contribution to the life of the local community, and its place in the precinct which includes other turn of the century buildings. (Criterion 4.1)

It is significant in contributing to the community's sense of place as an integral part of the central precinct of the town since the construction of the original Post and Telegraph Office in 1886. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Bridgetown Post Office is typical of moderate sized country post offices and has a strong resemblance to other country post offices along the South Western Highway. These exhibit similar plan forms, but have individually treated street elevations, with characteristic street arcades and hipped roofs. The place is significant in demonstrating the characteristics of a Federation Free Classical purpose built post office. (Criterion 6.1)

Bridgetown Post Office fulfils the role of any busy operating post office in a moderate sized country centre. It is significant in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a purpose built post office and its evolution. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Bridgetown Post Office is generally in good condition. It continues to serve its historic function and retains the same symbolic importance. Maintenance on the place has ensured that it retains many of its features and finishes intact. It was refitted and renovated in 1994, and is in sound condition throughout.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The original post office and postmaster's quarters (1886, demolished 1980 and replaced with car parking) was located immediately south of the current post office. *Bridgetown Post Office* (1912) was originally a post and telegraphs office. It acquired an integral telephone exchange (1925-6) which was later relocated to the east in a new building. The Post Office reverted to providing only postal and associated services. It continues to fulfil its postal function. The place retains a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Bridgetown Post Office has lost its associated quarters to the south and has been modified on a number of occasions, such that only the external appearance of the basic fabric and overall form with some internal elements and finishes remain intact. The demand for post boxes and the reorganisation for the current fit out have diminished the authenticity of the porches and interior respectively. The place retains a moderate degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Robin Chinnery, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Philip Griffiths, Architect, of Considine and Griffiths Architects.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Bridgetown Post Office is a single-storey, red brick and render post office with a corrugated zincalume roof.

In 1852, A. C. Gregory made the original survey of the Geegelup area. By 1857, Edward Hester and John Blechynden had taken up large holdings in the Geegelup district, introducing sheep and cattle.¹ In 1862, John Allnutt began to establish an orchard in the district, which was to lay the foundations of the fruit growing industry in the area.² In early 1864, representations were made by Mr. James Lee Steere, requesting that a Post Office be opened to serve the needs of the European settlers, to operate from 'Mr. Blechynden's house on the Blackwood.'³ Mrs. Moulton, wife of the policeman in Geegelup, was appointed as postmistress for the district as of 14 April 1864; the post office operated from the building at Blechynden's property which served as the police station.⁴ The Geegelup Post Office handled letters, stamps, money orders, and telegrams, with the latter being relayed from town to town by horsemen.⁵

The first police station was constructed on the south bank of the Blackwood River by C. Keyser at a cost of £205 in mid 1867.⁶ It was occupied by Constable Moulton and his wife, who continued as the postmistress.

In April 1868, following his earlier reports that the European settlers were requesting that some lots should be laid out on the Geegelup townsite 'to induce some four tradesmen, carpenter, blacksmith, wheelwright and shoemaker, who are, and have been here for some time, to finally settle in the place and induce others to follow.', T. Campbell Carey surveyed the townsite, and suggested that the town be named Bridgetown.⁷

The town of Bridgetown was proclaimed by Governor J. S. Hampton on 4 June 1868.⁸ By 1872, the town consisted of seven houses, including the police station, a general store, a small building for a hotel and John Blechynden's and Joe Smith's houses.⁹ The population increased slowly in the 1870s, with the pastoral industry and timber cutting predominant industries, for the fledgling fruit growing industry continued to have problems due to its distance from

1 *Bridgetown Centenary Year 1868-1968* Shire of Bridgetown, 1968, p.4.

2 *ibid*

3 Quoted in Owen, G. E. 'The History of the Post Office in the Colony of Western Australia 1829-1901' Typescript, 1959, Australian Archives and Battye Library, p.34.

4 *Western Australia Government Gazette* 14 April 1864.

5 *Blackwood Times* 15 December 1961.

6 *Western Australia Government Gazette* 26 February 1867 and 26 May 1867.

7 Letters from Assistant Surveyor T. Campbell Carey to Surveyor General Captain Roe, 2 February 1868 and 20 April 1868 in *Bridgetown Centenary Year 1868-1968* Shire of Bridgetown, 1968, p.3.

8 *Western Australia Government Gazette* 16 June 1868.

9 May, John Recollections in *Blackwood Times* 16 March 1934.

markets. In 1879, Bridgetown had grown to twenty households, several stores, and public houses.¹⁰

On 20 August 1886, a tender was let to James S. Gibbs at £587/7/-, to construct a post office at Lot 39, Hampton Street, Bridgetown.¹¹ Gibbs had built the Police Station and Lockup at Lot 38, Hampton Street, Bridgetown in 1880, at a cost of £423.¹² In late 1886, the Bridgetown Post and Telegraph Office was opened. Henceforward telegrams were sent through Morse code from one exchange to another until they reached their destination. This post office was one of the first purpose built post offices in Western Australia; it was designed by George Temple Poole and was identical to the Gingin Post Office.¹³

The building boom in Western Australia during the gold boom saw an increased demand for sawn timber, and numerous 'spot mills' opened in the Bridgetown area, with the first steam driven mill opening in 1895.¹⁴ The expansion of the timber industry brought an increase in population. In 1898, the opening of the railway to Bridgetown provided the means for the fruit growing industry to expand as it brought markets on the Goldfields within reach. Many of the railway construction workers remained to settle on holdings in the district after the completion of the railway, further boosting the population.

Following Federation in 1901, Posts and Telegraphs became a responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. Accordingly, the Bridgetown Post and Telegraph Office was transferred to the Commonwealth, the site being valued at £250 and the building at £587.¹⁵

In February 1909, recognising the need for expanded facilities to service the increased population of Bridgetown, plans were drawn for alterations and additions to the postmaster's residence and for a new office to the south of the existing Bridgetown Post Office.¹⁶ In his report of March 1909, the Divisional Inspector reported that there was a need for increased postal accommodation at the Bridgetown Post Office.¹⁷ A public meeting in Bridgetown on 13 April 1909, resolved that a letter should be written to Sir John Forrest MP requesting that a new post office should be built in Bridgetown.¹⁸ In July 1909, the Divisional Inspector wrote 'the present site is ample for our requirements.'¹⁹ In September 1909, the P. M. G. again considered alterations to the post office, for conditions were particularly cramped in the original postal lobby which was 12 feet 3 inches x 8 feet 3 inches; it was suggested that an additional room be erected on the site between the Bridgetown Post Office and the Mechanics

10 *Bridgetown Centenary Year 1868-1968* Shire of Bridgetown, 1968 p.7.

11 *Western Australia Government Gazette* 26 August 1886.

12 *Western Australia Government Gazette* 16 March 1880.

13 National Trust Assessment *Bridgetown Post Office* July 1993. Both of these post offices were constructed as part of a chain of post and telegraph offices from the north-west to the south-west of Western Australia in 1886-1887.

14 Gaines, C. 'Bridgetown 100 Years of History' Typescript Thesis, 1970 Battye Library, p.15.

15 Plan Showing Proposed Extension to Post Office Site Bridgetown, May 1921, Australian Archives K 273/144 Item 1925/4.

16 Sketch Plan, 23 February 1909, Plan nos. 30X18 and 40X18 Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

17 Report of Divisional Inspector P. M. G. 2 March 1909, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

18 Report of public meeting in Bridgetown, 13 April 1909, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

19 Letter 14 July 1909, from Inspector to Inspection Branch, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

Institute, and that the existing building be converted into private quarters.²⁰ The building was re-roofed in October-November 1909, by W. T. Deeble of Subiaco at a cost of £39/15/11.²¹ In his report of 9 December 1909, the Divisional Inspector described the old post office as 'an old one, badly built and designed and will constantly need repairing and renovating.'²² His conclusion was that 'a new building would be most economical in the long run, having in mind the progress the district is making and the future prospects of its rapid development.'²³

In 1910, the debate about the relative merits of extending the existing post office or erecting a new post office continued. It was proposed that a new site be acquired in closer proximity to the railway station for the erection of a new post office, and that the site of the existing Bridgetown Post Office should be transferred to the State for school purposes; however, the State decided that it did not require the site.²⁴ The price asked by W.C. Nietschke, owner of the proposed site near the railway station, was considered to be excessive, and the proposal to acquire it was discarded in August 1910.²⁵

Representations made by Sir John Forrest MP on behalf of the people of Bridgetown brought a response in 1910; the Under Secretary recommended the erection of a new building, following the recommendation of the Deputy Post Master General for the erection of an office 'on the west side of the present building.'²⁶ It was noted that there were 'a number of mail services radiating from that office, quantity of mail handled being considerable'; and also that a telephone exchange was to be installed in the near future, requiring further space.²⁷ The new building which was proposed was considered to be 'too elaborate and too costly'; thus a request was made for a building which would meet the requirements of providing the accommodation needs of the Bridgetown Posts and Telegraph Office at a cost 'not to exceed £1,250.'²⁸

On 13 May 1911, the tender was let to E. J. Pike of Bridgetown for Alterations and Additions to *Bridgetown Post Office* at a cost of £955/9/-.²⁹ The work was completed 16 February 1912, at a final cost of £990/10/-.³⁰ Additions included installation of private letter boxes, notice boards, and lettering.³¹

20 Letter, 3 September 1909, from Deputy Post Master General to Commonwealth Works Registrar, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

21 P.W.D. Contract Book 1908-1910.

22 Report of Divisional Inspector P.M.G. 24 December 1909, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

23 *ibid.*

24 Letter, 14 February 1909, from Deputy Post Master General to Commonwealth Works Registrar, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

25 Letter, 12 August 1910, from Deputy Post Master General to Secretary Post Master General's Department, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

26 Report to Central Office G 1303/16 (Home Affairs Estimates 1910/1911) Re Bridgetown New Post Office, Australian Archives K1/1 263/15.

27 *ibid.*

28 *ibid.*

29 P.W.D. Contract Book 1910-1911.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

Further land at the rear of Bridgetown Lot 39, the site of *Bridgetown Post Office* was acquired in the 1920s.³²

By February 1924, it was recognised that there was a need to expand the facilities at *Bridgetown Post Office* to provide for the growing and changing needs of the community. The proposed 'improved accommodation' would 'provide accommodation of standard type for the public office and telephone exchange.'³³ The initial plans did not provide sufficient width for these requirements; the suggestion was made that two rooms of the postmaster's quarters (situated at the south side of the post office) be resumed to provide the requisite area; however, this would have left insufficient accommodation for the Post Master, so an alternative was proposed, that the Commissioner of Police be approached 'to release approximately 20 feet of Police Reserve' on the north side of *Bridgetown Post Office*.³⁴ This was agreed 'on condition that it is used for building purposes only.'³⁵ Sketch plans were drawn in mid 1924, for Additions and Alterations at an estimated cost of £2,170 if the building were roofed with iron or £2,220 for a tile roof.³⁶ The cost was considered too high, so amended plans were drawn early 1925, with an estimated cost of £1,200; also it had been found impossible to acquire 20 feet on the north as proposed in 1924. As it was possible to acquire only 15 feet of building space, allowing for a three feet wide passage way between the postal and police properties, it had been necessary to reduce the width of the proposed telephone exchange and to re-position public telephone cabinets.³⁷ Further changes were made to the plans in July 1925, reducing the size of the Exchange Room to 13' 6" x 10' 6", providing a large window in that room and a door for external access with a hatch for night calls.³⁸ The tender was called in November 1925; it was let to W. S. Wark of Bridgetown, at a cost of £1732/16/-.³⁹

These additions and alterations were carried out in 1925-1926. It was specified that the bricks were to match existing bricks 'in colour, size and quality' for exterior walls, and that the walls should have a concrete foundation; jarrah boards matching those of the existing ceiling were to be used for the new ceiling; timber flooring was to be used (obtained from Whittakers); also that 'the steel stanchion and joists must be of Australian manufacture, as well as other material when available.'⁴⁰ These additions and alterations included accommodation for the telephone exchange; new w.c.'s to replace the previous w.c.'s; various new fittings, and an iron roof. In May

32 Plans of Bridgetown Post Office site 1903-1925, Australian Archives K273/44 1925/4.

33 Memo, 14 February 1924, P.M.G. Dept. to Commonwealth Works Registrar W. A., Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

34 Memo, 21 May 1924, from Commonwealth Works Registrar W. A., Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

35 *ibid*

36 Memo, 7 August 1924, from Under Secretary for Works and Labour, Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

37 Memo, 13 February 1925, Commonwealth Works Registrar W. A., Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

38 Memo, 27 July 1925, from P.M. G. Dept. Melbourne, Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

39 Memo, 27 November 1925, from Works Director, Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

40 Alterations and Additions, Bridgetown Post Office, Various memoranda, November 1925 - March 1926, Australian Archives K279/13 1924/1431.

1926, it was possible for post office officials to change over into the new part of *Bridgetown Post Office*; however, work was not completed until December 1926.⁴¹

In July 1953, new telephone switchboards were installed in order to 'enable an extra telephonist to be employed during the busy periods, with subsequent improvement in the disposal of telephone traffic.'⁴²

The direct entry to the post office from the postmaster's quarters was closed off in the early 1950s.⁴³

Repairs and Maintenance in 1959, included provision of a 'suitable infill panel on the return wall to the entrance porch and fix glass fronted notice case thereto', permanent fixing of the sashes of the three semi-circular fanlights over the writing slopes, and provision of a 24" x 16" trapdoor in the floor of the Mail Room in the south east corner in order to treat the building for termites.⁴⁴ As the Bridgetown district developed in the late 1950s, it became necessary to extend the facilities of *Bridgetown Post Office*. It was decided in 1959 to erect a new line maintenance centre in Roe Street, to overcome problems of congestion at the rear of the post office site; and also to extend the Trunk Line Equipment building located at the rear of the post office building. This work was completed in mid 1960, by F. Cuperus of Melville at a cost of £8,256.⁴⁵ It was at about this time that changes were made to the ventilation of the building, with closure of the original vents.⁴⁶

The erection of a new telephone exchange in Bridgetown in 1961, at a cost of £56,000, provided more accommodation for the post office in the area of the building previously occupied by the exchange. The area was opened into the main post office with the removal of the interior walls to the former telephone exchange, and with columns installed to provide additional support to the ceiling.⁴⁷

In the 1970s, changes were made to the layout and fittings of the place. The jarrah writing slopes were removed.⁴⁸

The postmaster's quarters were in some disrepair by 1980. There were holes and cracks in the walls, and the building was considered to be beyond repair. It was demolished in late 1980.⁴⁹

41 Memo, 24 May 1926, G. Greenway; memo, 1 December 1926, Clerk of Works, Australian Archives K279/13 1924 1431.

42 Draft Press release, 27 July 1953, Australian Archives K1209/1 NN Folder 1 (1924-1968).

43 Conversation by Robin Chinnery with Vern Dalby, retired Post Master, *Bridgetown Post Office* Memo, HCWA file PD 0240, 25 November 1996.

44 Memos, February to September 1959, re Repairs and Maintenance, *Bridgetown Post Office*, Australian Archives PP280/1 P 1958/59/873.

45 Memo, 18 November 1959, from Superintendent Williams Buildings Branch to Public Relations Office, Australian Archives K1209/1 NN Folder 1 (1924-1968); tender acceptance, and correspondence with F. Cuperus, November 1959 to July 1960, Australian Archives PP280/1 P 1959/60/942.

46 Conversation by Robin Chinnery with Vern Dalby, retired Post Master, *Bridgetown Post Office* Memo, HCWA file PD 0240, 25 November 1996.

47 *ibid.*

48 *ibid.*

49 Conversations by Robin Chinnery with T. Clinch of Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes Memo, HCWA file PD 0240, 25 November 1996 and 12 December 1996.

In May 1985, the property in Hampton Street, Bridgetown was sub-divided for Australian Postal Commission and Telecommunications Commission; *Bridgetown Post Office* site reverted to Lot 39.

A brass plaque was mounted on the building as part of the Geegelup Heritage Trail, an Australian Bi-centennial Project. It records the commencement of a postal service to Geegelup, and the re-naming of the office to Bridgetown. Further 'It is unclear when this post office building was constructed, although government records indicate that it was prior to 1895.'⁵⁰

In 1994, the fittings and decor of the post office were changed as part of the standardisation of all Australia Post offices. New light fittings were installed, and changes were also effected to the layout at this time to provide for the additional space required for an Australia Post shop in the public space; the Post Master was re-located to the rear of the office.⁵¹

Bridgetown Post Office continues to serve the needs of the community of Bridgetown. There are currently 700 private boxes. The building is valued as an important part of the streetscape, and as an integral part of the town's heritage.

⁵⁰ Site visit by Robin Chinnery Memo, HCWA file PD 0240, 25 November 1996.

⁵¹ Conversation by Robin Chinnery with the current Post Master and postal assistants at *Bridgetown Post Office* Memo, HCWA file PD 0240, 25 November 1996.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Bridgetown Post Office is a single-storey structure predominantly in the Federation Free Style, constructed in several campaigns.⁵² Each stage is constructed in English bond brickwork with rendered sills, strings, arches, keystones, pediments and parapet copings, all painted white and a replacement corrugated galvanised Zinalume roof. The former lunch room on the rear verandah is timber frame construction with chamfered edge weatherboard cladding. There is no surface evidence of the original post office and post master's quarters other than a remnant section of wall attached to the present post office's south wall.

Bridgetown Post Office is set at the northern end of the town centre shopping strip in a civic precinct comprising the former Mechanics' Institute, former Police Quarters, former Lockup and former Courthouse. It lies on the east side of the road and is built on ground rising away from the street. The quarters site to the south is now a car park. *Bridgetown Post Office* is set on the back edge of pavement with the original three bay arcade now filled in at the street alignment and the later bays to the north remaining open. The integral phone boxes have been replaced by two Telstra cabins to the south of the Post Office in front of the present car park. Several informally arranged small signs and the Australia Post internally illuminated sign have been attached to the front elevation walls and these are beginning to clutter the main elevation.

The northern boundary has a timber picket fence and some corrugated fibro cement fences and the southern boundary is fenced in corrugated fibro cement fencing. The rear gardens have concrete paths and lawns with a garden shed located on the southern boundary and a brick construction toilet block located part way up the garden. To the rear of the site a red brick construction telephone exchange has been constructed(1960).

Bridgetown Post Office (1911-12) is simply rendered in the Federation Free Style. The principal or southern section is divided into three equal bays which were formerly part of an arcade with a string course from which spring three equal ogee head arches with rendered label moulds. A panel parapet is set over the arcade with a pediment set above the panel. The bas-relief lettering has been replaced. The dado level of the arches to the arcade has been filled with brickwork and the upper arches filled with fixed lights and small pane fan lights. This section is roofed with a hipped roof with louvred gablets. Ridge ventilators were removed when the place was re-roofed. A brick skin wall had been added to the southern wall following the demolition of the attached post office and post master's quarters in 1980.

The later section to the north is constructed in a similar manner, although it is treated very simply with some of the decorative rendered details used in the main building omitted from the addition. It consists of a two bay arcade, with a tiled floor over the original granolithic and a single room behind the arcade. The telephone exchange and mail room extension was located to the northern side of the post office set under a similar roof to the earlier building to the south and is attached to it. The arcade has been crudely altered to accommodate post boxes. The windows are double hung sashes. The facade

⁵² 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. 136-139.

has the words *Bridgetown Post Office* in metal letters in Roman script attached to the panel under the pediment with a small crown and the E.R. insignia set on a plaque above the rendered panel.

The interior layout of *Bridgetown Post Office* is simply divided in terms of the internal volumes and then further divided by three quarter height screens and postal box enclosures. The southern section is a single volume with a single room divided off to the south east corner for amenities. The remainder of the space is divided by screen to separate work and public areas. The original timber lined ceiling remains in place, though the vents have been blocked and roof ventilators over them removed. The public area is fitted out with the current Australia Post standard system of grey panels, counters and displays. The addition to the north is spatially joined to the earlier building along almost its length with the former wall changed into a pier and lintel system.. The interior of this northern space is similar to the adjoining building sharing the same finishes. The former lunchroom which is in timber frame construction at the rear is entered separately from the verandah and there is evidence on the western wall of this space having been toilets.

The main postal hall retains its essential architectural features in terms of the timber lined ceiling and wall finishes. Evidence of the front of the building having been part of the arcade has been effectively obliterated. The present screens and counters and writing slopes are all products of the recent fitting out work. The floors under the former work area behind the original counter line are of timber and those in the former public areas at the front of the building are granolithic. All are now covered with grey carpet.

Bridgetown Post Office strongly resembles Beasley's design for the post office in Donnybrook which followed shortly afterwards. Both were similar in plan and elevation rhythm, but differ in stylistic rendering. Both have been subject to similar changes with similar design solutions, though Donnybrook retains a higher degree of authenticity.

Each of the alterations is discernible, though all changes up to the 1950s were designed to blend in with the existing fabric. All remaining fabric is well maintained though later alterations have tended to ignore the original intent, imposing instead a national corporate identity into an individual place.

A recently constructed metal frame shed, masonry construction toilets in the rear yard and the telephone exchange on the adjoining lot are not included in this assessment.

13.3 REFERENCES

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