



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

Pinjarra Post Office is a fine example of Federation Arts and Crafts Style for a post office and residence, with a later addition in matching style. (Criterion 1.1)

Pinjarra Post Office makes an important contribution to the streetscape of James Street, and is visually linked to neighbouring public buildings of prominence in the town. (Criterion 1.4)

Pinjarra Post Office is significant in exhibiting a townscape environment in conjunction with the police station and *Old Pinjarra School, St. John's Church, and Edenvale Group.* (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Pinjarra Post Office is of historic value for its association with the evolution of postal services in the district. The importance is enhanced by the attached residence as a demonstration of way of life of the postmaster and his family. (Criterion 2.1)

Pinjarra Post Office is important for its association with former police buildings on the site, the adjoining police station, and the site of the former post office which was associated with Mrs Sutcliffe. These places collectively form a heritage focus at the George and James Street intersection. (Criterion 2.2)

Pinjarra Post Office is important for its postal function in the Murray District, and its association with the McLarty family- successful pioneers, farmers, builders and politicians for the Murray District, and for its association with Mrs Sutcliffe. The building provides a reminder of the contribution to the community by the former postmistresses. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Pinjarra Post Office contributes to the community's sense of place by providing a physical and social focus through its communications link, and as a service point on a principal transport route. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The application of the predominantly residential Federation Arts and Crafts style is uncommon for the design of a civic building. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Pinjarra Post Office is representative of Poole's use of domestic style of architecture for public buildings with a small scale community function. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

With the exception of the need to waterproof around the windows and repaint the joinery the building exterior is in good condition. Some maintenance is required to ceilings, joinery paintwork and walls to the interior of the residence.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Pinjarra Post Office has lost its residential function, with postal services occupying the lower level. The bedrooms on the upper level are vacant. However, the structure of the building remains substantially intact despite the insertion of modern conveniences. *Pinjarra Post Office* retains a moderate degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Although *Pinjarra Post Office* has been extended and the roof cladding has been replaced, the extent of changes to the exterior surfaces is minimal. Changes to the interior have been made; however, the fabric of the original building has not been significantly altered, and therefore *Pinjarra Post Office* retains a reasonable degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The following information is based on the assessment compiled by David Kelsall, 1994.

In 1835, the Governor in Council, concerned with Postage of Letters, formalised postal service in the Colony.¹

At that time, mail between Pinjarra and Perth or Fremantle was conveyed by travellers. Mail was irregular and uncoordinated. Thomas Peel corresponded with the Colonial Secretary agitating for the Murray District to be better served. In August 1840, Peel was advised that a formal postal service had been established to serve the district. On a fortnightly basis, a soldier from Pinjarra would ride up the track towards Canning. At some point he would meet a soldier despatched from Canning with the mail for the Murray District. The soldiers exchanged mail at the Serpentine River, probably *Serpentine Farm*.²

In 1841, civilian contractors were engaged for mail delivery in the District, whilst Sergeant Burrell, at the Pinjarra garrison, served as postmaster.³ The first contractor was Thomas Watson who plied between Pinjarra and Bunbury via Australind, linking with another contractor, Thomas Hester Jun. who carried mail between Canning and Pinjarra.⁴

After Sergeant Burrell's recall in 1844, Mary Ann McLarty was given the position of Postmistress, and paid the sum of £12 per year. Although, the sum was withdrawn after the first year, Mrs McLarty continued to conduct postal duties on an honorary basis.⁵

Changes to the mail routes began to take place. Mail for Pinjarra was conveyed through Mandurah by aborigines, as the mail contractors were proving expensive. A local aborigine was paid 2 lb. flour daily for delivery, while also assisting other government agents in the town, including, the magistrate or the policeman. This practice continued between 1849 and 1853.⁶

In 1856, the police took up the conveyance of mail between Mandurah and Pinjarra. In 1858, the mail service between Canning and Pinjarra on the route south to Bunbury was resumed and the Pinjarra to Mandurah link was retained to serve Mandurah's postal needs.

In 1858, Mrs McLarty was officially appointed at a salary of £6 per annum, which rose to £20 per annum by 1868. She operated the post office for much of this time from *Blythewood*.⁷

1 *Perth Gazette*, 31 January 1835.

2 Richards, R., *The Murray District of Western Australia, A History, 1829-1900*, (Murray Shire, 1978)

3 Whiteley, E. S., & C. G. S., *The Military Establishment in Western Australia*, p. 48.

4 Richards.

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.*

7 Pinjarra Post Office, typescript, Acc 2173 A/1, Batty Library.

As a result of agitation from local residents, Mrs Sutcliffe was appointed to run the post office from town. She resided in a cottage opposite the Police Station and Courthouse. During her incumbency, Mrs Sutcliffe transmitted messages comprising coded instructions and essential information between the conspirators in the *Catalpha* episode. When she retired after 25 years as postmistress, she was paid a pension of £50 per annum. In addition to her mail duties, the services conducted included the Post Office Savings Bank Agency and the telegraph .⁸

Pinjarra became a money-order post office in 1880.⁹

A Royal Mail Coach Service was inaugurated between Perth and the Vasse District. The service was initially provided by the Police Department which proved expensive at £30/- for the full journey. Tenders were called in 1888, and won by Edward McLarty who continued the service until rail linked Pinjarra to Perth in 1893. The horse drawn Royal Mail Coach Service could not compete with rail, and ceased to operate. McLarty managed to sell his coaches at a good price as they were desperately needed for service in the burgeoning goldfields.¹⁰

On the other side of James Street, but still on the west side of George Street was Mrs Sutcliffe's little cottage, which was also the Post Office. In 1891 the local settlers expressed the opinion that a new Post Office should be built, explaining that the picturesque two-storied building was erected several years later, on the corner of the Police Reserve opposite. It housed the post office, telegraph room and the postmaster's family.¹¹

Pinjarra Post Office was built in 1896, by H. Parker for £968/11/02, and designed by the Colonial architect, George Temple-Poole.¹² The building was described in the *Government Gazette* as '...a two-storey brick building, affording accommodation for the postal department on the ground floor, and quarters on the upper floor. There are also necessary outbuildings. The work has been completed.'¹³

The original building was built of terracotta coloured clay bricks with a shingled roof in the Federation Arts and Crafts style.

In 1923, the building underwent additions and alterations under the supervision of the Principal Architect of the Public Works Department, W Hardwick. ¹⁴

The alterations included the conversion of postal offices to the postmaster's residence on the lower level with two bedrooms and a lounge within the earlier building space. A single storey addition to the northern side created space dedicated to postal activity.¹⁵

8 *ibid.*

9 Pope, B., "Post Office Survey", (for the National Trust of Australia (WA), 1992)

10 *i*Richards.

11 *West Australian*, 18 September 1891.

12 PWD Contract Book, Volume 1.

13 *Government Gazette* 1896

14 Australian Archives, Victoria Park, Microfiche Plans pp. 668/1.

15 PWD WA Drawing No. 22480, for plans and elevations.

Through photographic study, it is clear that minor modifications to the building exterior and interior have occurred between 1923 and 1944, including the change in the building function from residential to postal activity. The upper floor rooms remain unoccupied.

Both police and postal service facilities were originally located on Crown Reserve 26081, however on 17 October 1960, the reserve was subdivided and the Commonwealth of Australia became proprietor of Lot 219, the site containing the post office in the northern corner of the reserve. In August 1983, the title of Lot 219 was transferred to the Australian Postal Commission.

Currently, postal functions utilise the lower level of the building with the exception of the hall. The upper floor rooms are unoccupied. The expansion of office space, on the lower level, took place sometime between 1963 and 1982 (a metric re-draw delineates a change of function). The building has lost its viability for residential accommodation due to its loss of a private access to wet areas.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Pinjarra Post Office is a two-storey building designed by George Temple-Poole in 1896, in Federation Arts and Crafts style with a single storey addition in 1923, by W. B. Hardwick.

Pinjarra Post Office is domestic in scale and style, and is constructed with gable roofs that were originally shingled and later replaced with tiles. Poole had used shingles previously on other post offices at Geraldton (c. 1894) and South Fremantle, contemporaneously with *Albany Post Office* (c. 1896).

The main roof extends asymmetrically over the entrance porch, a detail common to Poole's work, and features tall chimneys with terracotta pots.

The walls are constructed of brickwork with neatly laid with bricks of varying colour. The original bricks came from wood-burning kilns during the nineteenth century.¹⁶ A later addition was made in bricks of a different colour.

The gables feature bracketed projecting timber screen infills.

The street facade features elongated timber framed windows of one, two and three lights, with notched and chamfered concrete lintels, and arched soldier courses over. The resulting spandrel being infilled with rubbed brick tiles. The early windows, depicted in the original drawings, give the street elevation a vertical emphasis, and increasing the presence of the building in the townscape.

The main entry porch, on its south west corner, is set back from the street frontage and opens directly into the hall which contains a stair, with turned timber balusters, and a cupboard under.

To the rear of the hall, a door opened to a welfare room under a lean-to roof. A door to the left of the hall opened to postal offices. The residence was located entirely on the upper floor. The public entry to the postal hall was

¹⁶ Oldham, R. & J., *George Temple-Poole, Architect of the Golden Years 1885-1897*, (UWA Press, Nedlands, 1980) p. 58.

through a door, now sealed, located near the north east corner of the original building. 1923 alterations conceal the entry.

The building is sited on the James Street alignment. The hotel to the north, whilst its street frontage has been degraded, has elements of aesthetic value. The police station to the south west along George Street, with an art deco facade, in conjunction with the post office forms a group in a civic precinct.

Located opposite the *Pinjarra Post Office*, is the site of Mrs Sutcliffe's Cottage. Intermittent buildings in both directions along George Street are of heritage value. To the north lies *St John's Church*, the bridge, *Edenvale* and *Liveringa* homesteads. *Pinjarra Post Office* in its siting close to the street is the more prominent of these buildings as most are set back from the street alignment. In addition it is at the heart of them. These buildings are visually linked by their red brick masonry.

The public entrance porch was located on the north west corner of the building with access to the public area on the right with postal offices behind.

The stair hall retains original fittings, door furniture and coat hooks on a rail. The ceiling over the lower flight of stairs is raked.

The ceiling of the main room on the upper level, is as built in 1896, with timber battens, the remainder have been replaced since 1923, possibly due to the consequence of water damage from the shingled roof. It is possible that remedial works to the ceiling were necessary as a consequence of damage caused to the main roof soon after the addition was completed.¹⁷

Feature elements remain on the upper floor, including, the timber staircase, timber joinery and furniture, timber trims and the lathe and plaster walls. The fireplace mantles have been cut about.

The ground floor retains its pantry shelving, timber partition, ceiling, and dado line in the wall plaster of the kitchen from the 1923 or earlier phase.

The building has undergone two phases of alteration. The 1923 addition was carried out by, the then Principal Architect of the Public Works Department, W. B. Hardwick, incumbent between 1917-1927. A single storey addition was added to accommodate postal activities. The original postal offices on the lower level were converted to a living room and two bedrooms. The welfare room was converted to a kitchen and pantry.

The domestic scale was transformed to give a civic presence by the projecting main gable on the upper floor. The layout of the former public entry can only be surmised, as there is little evidence of it ever having been from the street front.

The building style was repeated in its addition; however, the drawings show a smaller gable addressing George Street than executed. The enlarged size of the gable dominates the main elevation. Its ridge meets the ridge behind, and with the subsequent alterations to the fenestration and the gable spandrel, a new rhythm and proportion divorces the elevation from its original character. The proportion of the entrance porch is, consequently, unrepresentative of Hardwick's intent.

¹⁷ Richard, for photograph entitled, "George Street in 1922".

The bricks used in the later work are darker in colour, and their junction with the original work is evident. The junction between the hipped roof over the smaller ground floor bedroom of the original building, is visible at the rear on the upper level, where attempts have been made to conceal its junction with render. The fairfaced brickwork below the level of the early roof now shows below the render.

Subsequent alterations have occurred, since 1923, and include: alterations to the window treatment; re-roofing with marseilles patterned tiles; chimneys rebuilt at the roof penetration level; gable spandrel sheeting and batten spacing altered; barge capping painted; main doors replaced; a fence installed removing the direct access from the street to the hall; and, the post box recess extended inwards from the entrance porch. The verandah has been enclosed to extend the postal hall space, internal partitioning removed, and fireplaces filled in and mantles painted.

13.3 REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition, September 1988.