



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No.** 1980
2. **Name.** Swan Barracks (1896 +)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry.** Swan Barracks and the land on which it stands, being Perth Town Lot Y60 comprised in C/T 1224/378.
4. **Local Government Area.** City of Perth
5. **Location.** Francis Street, Perth.
6. **Owner.** Commonwealth of Australia
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Development of the Swan Barracks commenced in 1896 with the construction of a Volunteer Drill Hall, facing Francis Street. Between 1896 and 1958 a number of additions and extensions have been built.¹ The period encompassed by the development of the Swan Barracks includes the Goldrushes, Federation, and the First and Second World Wars.

The Barracks, originally built as a training centre for the local militia, was later incorporated into the Australian army following federation. The Barracks was used as the Fifth Military District Headquarters up until 1993. However, the Australian defence forces no longer requires the Swan Barracks, and has vacated the place.

Documentary evidence describing in detail the development of the place, and the persons and events associated with it is included in *The Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks*.²

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Development of the Swan Barracks commenced in 1896 with The first building of the Swan Barracks complex was the Volunteer Drill Hall, constructed in 1896. In the

¹ The Swan Barrack encompasses all the identified buildings on the site with the exception of the garage and darkroom block and the women's toilet additions to the Toilet and Ablutions block.

² Stephens, J.R. *Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks, Military Headquarters, Western Australia* (Australian Property, Department of Administrative Services, W.A., July 1992), pp.9-44.

following year a two storey stone Administration Office was built in front of the Drill Hall, to form an entrance off Francis Street.

In 1900 an Artillery Drill Hall was constructed just west of the Volunteer Drill Hall, thus doubling the size of buildings on the site. Five years later, in 1905, an L-shaped Ordinance Store was constructed in the north western corner of the site, separated from the Artillery Drill Hall by a narrow alley. The Ordinance Store was further added to in 1910 along its eastern wing. At the same time a third storey was added to the administrative offices, and offices added to the eastern side of the Drill Hall.

In 1911-12 a further L-shaped wing was added to the Ordinance Store, on the south eastern corner. The three buildings comprising the Ordinance Stores occupied the entire western facade on Museum Street, in a large C-shaped design with the wings running to the east. The Ordinance Store remained separated from the Artillery Drill Hall by a narrow alley. Also a toilet block was constructed along the northern, back, boundary.

Apart from minor extensions to the toilet block at the rear of the block in 1936 and conversion of part of the Ordinance Store into the Officers' Mess, there was no further construction on site until 1939-41, when a two storey wing was constructed along the Francis Street boundary of the block (East Wing). At the same time a passage to facilitate movement between the East Wing and the Administration Offices was excised from space in the Drill Hall.

In 1941, a brick fronted weatherboard building was constructed along the Beaufort Street boundary (North-East Wing), with a short passage connecting it to the East Wing. Some eighteen years later, in 1957-58, the last development of the site took place with the construction of a building (West Wing) along Francis Street to connect the Ordinance Store with the Administration block. The West Wing completed the infill on the Francis Street elevation and presented a continuous facade to the street. Meanwhile the Artillery Drill Hall had been demolished, providing a large open area between the Drill Hall and the Ordinance Store. The overall development of the site was now represented by a E-shape with the spine of the E along Francis Street and the wings pointing north. The two storey stone Administration Offices was the focal point of the Swan Barracks.

The architecture of the Swan Barracks buildings reflects the current circumstances at the time of their construction. However all the buildings demonstrate a functional simplicity and military severity in their form and detail.

The Perth Drill Hall was built a few years after the construction of the Fremantle Artillery Drill Hall, with which it shares a similar structural system. The form of both buildings was determined largely by functional and structural considerations.

The central stone Administration Offices, designed when George Temple-Poole was Chief Government Architect, has stylistic similarities to the Perth Mint. Both buildings are of a Federation Romanesque style with rusticated stonework, Romanesque forms, cubiform capitals and have a similar arrangement of columns. However the Barracks Administration Offices is of a more fortress like nature.

The Ordinance Store has no direct comparison to an existing Perth building although many of the stylistic features that are used on the building appear on other buildings types of the day.

The East and West Wings flanking the central Administration Offices have close links with a number of other military buildings in metropolitan Perth. The Hobbs Artillery Park in Karrakatta, also designed by Finlayson, has a number of stylistic features in common with the Barracks buildings.

The North East Wing is stylistically similar to other austere government institutions built during the Second World War, although two storey versions appear to be rare.

A detailed description of the buildings in the Swan Barracks is provided in The Conservation Plan for the Swan Barracks.³

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

Swan Barracks is an integral part of the Northbridge area, both historically and visually. The buildings form a continuous 'wall' along each of the three street frontages that define the extent of the Barracks. The colour, texture and scale of the 'wall', although potentially aggressive is a positive feature in the street and landscape.

Swan Barracks is closely associated with the Australian Army and with the neighbourhood. As an army barracks it is identified with defence, national image and tradition. Although not officially part of the Perth Cultural Centre there is little doubt that it contextually forms part of this precinct.

The Drill Hall is a fine example of late nineteenth century industrial architecture, as applied to colonial military activities. The functional building demonstrates a considerable degree of uniformity in its scale, form and materials. It uses lightweight materials and structure in an economic way to form a space that is both dramatic and dynamic. It is a dramatic form in the landscape, and stands in contrast to the other buildings. Of particular interest is the balcony that protruded into the drill space. This later addition provides a distinctive visual link between the stone Administration Offices and the Drill hall.

The Administration Building is a rusticated stone building in the Federation Romanesque style.⁴ It is a romantic interpretation of a fortress. Its

³ Stephens, J.R. *Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks, Military Headquarters, Western Australia* (Australian Property, Department of Administrative Services, W.A., July 1992), pp.26-39. and pp.235-237

contribution to the streetscape is hampered by the design of the later East and West wings, however its use of scale and form creates a dramatic presence.

The Ordinance Stores is a competent example of the Federation Warehouse style. Materials, texture and scale have been used to form a quiet, dignified military building. The building is a dominant form in Museum Street. Internally this building is generally plain, in keeping with its original purpose, except for the alterations to accommodate the Officers' Mess and the United Services Institute. These interior changes introduced some very fine decorative work typical of the 1930's, to complement the pre-existing timber ceilings, decorative timber cornice and picture rails, decorative skirtings, architraves, door and mantles of the previous offices.

The East and West Wings demonstrate a particular style associated with the beginnings of the modern movement in Western Australia. The buildings use scale, texture and material in a competent way to produce a good example of the 'modern style' of the later 1930's. There is a sophisticated use of brickwork with English bond and raked, cut and struck mortar joints producing a distinctive and pleasing texture to the building surface. The use of decorative brickwork to the parapet and over the vehicular entries enhance the character of the building and its deference to the streetscape.

The North-East Wing demonstrates the necessity of economy and speed associated with war time building construction. While the building has a unity and scale commensurate with adjacent buildings on the site and along the street, it is hampered by the timber structure behind the brick facade. A security wall separating the building from the street interferes with the building's connection to the street.

The Ablution Block is strictly utilitarian, in keeping with early twentieth century ideas about health and hygiene.

2. HISTORIC VALUE

Swan Barracks is directly associated with a sense of national identity and community spirit from the formation of the Commonwealth and the recognition of Australia as a sovereign state through to the present day. Part of this identity has been formed through the involvement of the army in various international conflicts, including the South African War, the First and Second World Wars and, to a lesser extent, the Korean and Vietnam Wars,

Swan Barracks is a record of social values and practices from the late nineteenth century to the present day and demonstrates army practice and tradition over this time.

The place is associated with a number of prominent people including: architect-soldier Sir J.J. Talbot Hobbs, who designed one of the original (though now demolished) structures on site, and was the Commander of the Australia Corps during the First World War;

⁴ Apperley, 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) p119

George Temple-Poole and Hillson Beasley, Chief Government Architects, who designed many of the public buildings in the immediate area (the Museum complex) and elsewhere in the State;
M. Finlayson, a Commonwealth Government Architect who designed a number of Federal buildings in Western Australia; and
W.H. Robertson who contributed to the education of design in W.A.

Swan Barracks is closely associated with the Royal United Services Institute, an organisation with roots in the nineteenth century. The Institute has an association with Swan Barracks dating from 1902 and resided there since about 1936.

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The toilets have scientific significance as being representative of an early deep sewer connected lavatory system.

4. SOCIAL VALUE

Swan Barracks has social significance for its association with the many soldiers who either drilled and served at the Barracks, or set out from the Barracks to various conflicts since 1896.

Swan Barracks is representative of soldiers of all ranks, from that of the Officers to that of the 'digger' in Western Australia.

5. RARITY

Swan Barracks is rare, being the only such diverse complex of army barrack buildings extant in Western Australia.

The roof structure of the Drill Hall is rare. The Perth Drill Hall and the Fremantle Artillery Drill Hall are structures that are not repeated anywhere else in WA.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

Swan Barracks is representative of Army buildings in Western Australia.

The Officers' Mess demonstrates the social and hierarchal order of the army and illustrates through its traditions and practices a particular way of life.

The alterations to the central stone Administrative Offices and the Ordnance Stores and the design of subsequent buildings of the site reflect the transition from horse to motor transport and demonstrate a concern with the garaging and parking of vehicles.

CONDITION

Considered as a complex Swan Barracks is in sound condition, and the structure and material have been well maintained.

Over the years there has been some concern about recurrent termite infestations. The extent of such damage needs to be determined and an assessment made of the structural condition of these areas.

The roofs to the Drill Hall and North West Wing are of asbestos cement sheeting, and being old and brittle, should be replaced for the possible health risks associated with asbestos. Likewise the roof to the Ordinance Store Building is nearing the end of its useful life and should be replace.

In other buildings minor efflorescence is occurring to the internal face of external walls in the Administration Offices and the west wall of the ground floor of the Ordnance Store Building.

For a detailed assessment of the condition of Swan Barracks and suggestions to their rectification refer to *The Conservation Plan for the Swan Barracks*.⁵

INTEGRITY

Over many years the Barracks has undergone a number of changes, commensurate with its uses. Some of these changes have been peripheral, others quite violent. Rather than detracting from potential significance the modification to the fabric documents the life of the building and its occupants and testify to its continued usefulness.

For a detailed exposition of the integrity of Swan Barracks refer to *The Conservation Plan for the Swan Barracks*.⁶ :

AUTHENTICITY

Some alterations have occurred to the original fabric of the Barracks buildings, however these changes demonstrate an evolution in function and are in keeping with the continuing use of the Barracks as military headquarters. The alterations involved relatively minor changes to the building fabric and the degree of authenticity is high.

⁵ Stephens, J.R. *Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks, Military Headquarters, Western Australia* (Australian Property, Department of Administrative Services, W.A., July 1992), pp.26-39. and pp.239-240 and pp.249-252.

⁶ Stephens, J.R. *Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks, Military Headquarters, Western Australia* (Australian Property, Department of Administrative Services, W.A., July 1992), pp.238- 239.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Swan Barracks has cultural significance as evidence of social and military practice and as a demonstration of a way of life. In a broader sense, the Swan Barracks has historic significance for its association with the development of Australia's defence forces and the projection of a national identity.

Swan Barracks has cultural significance for its association with the many soldiers who either served at the place or have set out from the Barracks to various conflicts since 1896.

Of significance are the association of the place with the soldier-architect Sir J.J.Talbot Hobbs, the Public Works Department and the Commonwealth Department of Works in the design, construction and development of the site.

The Drill Hall has considerable significance for its innovation and excellence in engineering, and its demonstration of early drill hall planning.

The Administration Offices has considerable significance for its architectural qualities and demonstration of building skill. Although the interior spaces have been severely compromised there is enough remaining documentary and physical evidence to support these statements.

The Ordnance Store Buildings have considerable significance for their architectural quality and demonstration of building skill, in particular the quality of the interior of the Officers' Mess and the United Services Institute area.

The North-West Wing has some significance as a demonstration of the austerity imposed on war-time buildings.

The East Wing has some significance as a demonstration of competent architectural and planning qualities and sound building practice at a critical time in the State's history.

The West Wing has some significance as a demonstration of competent architectural and planning qualities.

The Toilet Block have little significance as a demonstration of early twentieth century sanitary practices.

As a complex the Swan Barracks has considerable significance for its demonstration of the range of building types, architectural styles, building technology and development of military functions over a ninety year period.

Swan Barracks has significance as an important landmark in the Cultural Centre, and in Northbridge. The Swan Barracks has been synonymous with the physical and social fabric of Perth, since 1897.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 27/11/1992

Permanent Entry 26/11/1993

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

Stephens, J.R. *Conservation Plan for Swan Barracks, Military Headquarters, Western Australia* (Australian Property, Department of Administrative Services, W.A., July 1992)

Apperley, 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) p119

National Trust Assessment Exposition
Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet