HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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

Poole Street Footbridge, in its tranquil setting of the Avon River at a point where the river is in a relatively natural state, has landmark value. The style of timber construction, its regularity and uniformity of timber piers and the line of its footway, is juxtaposed against the natural state of the river. The strong contrast between industrial structure and natural setting contributes to the landmark quality of the place. (Criterion 1.2)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Poole Street Footbridge is closely associated with the development of the Goldfields Water supply pipeline from Perth to Kalgoorlie in the first decades of the century. (Criterion 2.1)

Poole Street Footbridge is representative of the construction of the pipeline through Northam at a time when the town was experiencing growth to the east, and the consolidation of its importance as a major rural centre. It is associated with the growth in prosperity of the town and district of Northam. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Poole Street Footbridge is valued by the community as a visible reminder of the decades of use by the population of West Northam during Northam's period of growth in the first quarter of the century, and by many workers and children, including migrants stationed at the Holden Camp, in the 1950s. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Poole Street Footbridge is a rare structure in Western Australia. It is the only bridge built for the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme at a major river crossing which serves as both pipeline bridge and footbridge. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

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12. 3 CONDITION

In January 1994, following an engineers report on the structure, Town of Northam recommended that urgent works be undertaken to repair the bridge decking and lighting because vandalism had made the bridge unsafe. The footbridge was closed awaiting the preparation of a maintenance program.

Despite the poor condition of the footbridge decking, overall *Poole Street Footbridge* is in fair structural condition. (See HCWA File No. 3549 for Margetts, L.L., 'Inspection Notes, Footbridges - Northam and Collie' for details on condition and recommendations for preservation.)

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The function of the bridge has changed from the dual use of pipeline bridge and footbridge, to being solely a footbridge. However, the structure still indicates where the pipeline traversed the river, and *Poole Street Footbridge* therefore retains a moderate degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

During alterations of the *Poole Street Footbridge* to a dedicated footbridge, the structure was upgraded, and it appears that the decking timbers were replaced. The handrail is also thought to have been replaced. Overall, *Poole Street Footbridge* retains its authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The following information is based largely on the heritage assessment prepared by Norma Lyons for the Avon Valley Environmental Society Inc. in November 1994.[1]

Poole Street Footbridge was built in 1917 by the Public Works Department as a combined pipeline crossing and footbridge as part of the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme.

In 1894 the Yilgarn Line, an extension of the Eastern Line of the railway from Northam, was laid as a consequence of the Coolgardie Goldfields boom. The railway extension assisted the development of Northam as a major country town. When construction of C. Y. O'Connor's plan to pipe water from the Helena River Reservoir, near Mundaring, to the Goldfields began in 1898, the railway which passed through Northam was used to carry the pipe.

The first 30" diameter (762 mm) sealed locking bar pipes of the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme (GWS) were buried in trenches.[2] In 1902, the pipe crossing the Avon River, near Northam, was embedded in concrete under the river, and a regulating tank was installed at West Northam.[3] In 1904, the town's water reticulation scheme, supplied from GWS, was opened.

To facilitate easy of access a deviation in the pipeline was constructed in 1917, which required a bridge across the river at Poole Street. The pipeline deviation of 16 chain 15 links at Poole Street, being of welded 5/16" steel pipe, cost approximately 800 pounds.[4] P. V. O'Brien, Engineer for the Goldfields region, is believed to have been the bridge designer.[5]

By 1917, West Northam was a well populated area of town, catering mainly for families of mill and railway workers. *Poole Street Footbridge* provided pedestrian access from the Perth Road on the north bank, to the Northam Railway Station (1894) on the south bank and the adjacent shops, hotel, houses, and railway workshops. The footbridge also provided access to the local swimming holes, such as Burlong Pool.

In the 1950s, the bridge was used extensively by European migrants who were temporarily housed at the Holden Migrant Camp, north-west of the town, and in other 'tent cities' that housed migrants working for Main Roads, the Water Supply Board, on Great Eastern Highway, or at the Northam Army Camp.

In 1958-9, a new bridge was constructed across the Avon River at Brun Street, west of *Poole Street Footbridge*, specifically to carry the deviated GWS pipeline. *Poole Street Footbridge* then became the property and responsibility of Town of Northam.

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1 Lyons, N., 'Heritage Assessment of the Poole Street Footbridge West Northam' (unpublished report for the Avon Valley Environmental Society, November 1994).

2 PWD Plans of Pipe Track Crossing Avon River, pp. 23-24.

3 PWD Annual Report, 1902, p. 56.

4 PWD Annual Report 1917-18, pp. 42-43.

5 Retrieval of original plans has not yet been successful.

In 1966, when a standard gauge railway was built, bypassing West Northam, new Avon railway yards were located to the north of the town, and West Northam Train Station was replaced by a station in East Northam. As a consequence, retail trade in West Northam subsided and this once busy end of town became quiet with many of the old buildings falling into disrepair. Traffic across the footbridge also decreased, but it was still used by steel and machinery workers travelling to premises on the north bank, by residents on recreational walks, and by children living south of the river for access to the swimming pool at Great Eastern Highway.

In January 1994, following an engineers report on the structure, Town of Northam recommended that urgent works be undertaken to repair the bridge decking and lighting because vandalism had made the bridge unsafe.[6] The bridge was closed awaiting the preparation of a maintenance program.[7] In March 1994, the Town of Northam resolved to demolish the bridge.[8] Protests were made to the Council by residents and to Senator Chamarett who met with Northam residents at the end of April, coinciding with the time Council advertised for tenders to demolish the bridge. Council resolved to defer a decision on demolition in order for Avon River Management Association to seek funding for conservation works. In 1995, the Avon Valley Environmental Society applied for funding from the Heritage Program of the Lotteries Commission.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Poole Street Footbridge over the Avon River, spans from the south bank at Poole Street, west of the old Northam Railway Station (now a Railway Museum) to the northern bank at the western boundary of Holtfreter's engineering works. The northern connection adjoins a concrete footpath to Great Eastern Highway. West of the footpath is a Recreational Reserve vested in the Town of Northam.

The bridge has a strong relationship to the river it crosses. This area of the Avon River is well vegetated although the undergrowth is badly degraded by weeds. Further down stream, a section of the flood plain is being revegetated. Indigenous plant species are being propagated for future planting. Winter water flow is stronger than that for summer in which the water level is reduced to pools. On the northern bank, beside the engineering works, a spring forms a freshwater pool and there is a large river island.

The river flows approximately three metres below the central section of the *Poole Street Footbridge.* River trees are close by, with one tree intruding into the walking space. On some approaches the bridge is partly obscured by the trees. The closeness of the water-birds on the river, banks and islands below, and the wide river channel midway to the bridge can be enjoyed without the disturbance of vehicular traffic.

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6 *Advocate,* May 18, 1994.

7 Council Minutes, 19 January, 1994.

8 Council Minutes, 23 March, 1994.

Poole Street Footbridge is a simple driven-pile timber bridge, about 150 metres in length and 2 metres wide, with a footway of 1.2 metres. The bridge has inclines from both banks to the central horizontal section over the river channel.

Poole Street Footbridge comprises 36 piers with two piles per pier at approximately 4.25 metre intervals, timber halfcaps and bracing, two sawn timber stringers per span, and timber decking of 150x50 mm. The bridge features handrails of 60 mm diameter iron welded water pipe.[9] Some piers outside the main river channel are buttressed with steel posts approximately 200 mm in diameter. The decking planks are edged with angle-iron.

Alterations to the bridge occurred when the pipeline was removed, circa 1960, and the structure was refurbished as a dedicated footbridge. The decking is believed to have been renewed at this time as no evidence remains of the pipe's fixture to the deck. The angle-iron fixed to the edges of the decking is believed to be an addition. The iron handrails probably replaced timber posts and rails.

The bridge is showing some damage due to age and vandalism, mainly in the decking. Some piers and bracing are in poor to fair condition. The condition report, prepared for the Town of Northam by Halpern Glick Maunsell in 1992, indicates the decking is of varying condition, with some planks having rotted and a few planks missing, but concluded that the bridge is generally in fair condition.[10]

In February 1995, Main Roads carried out an inspection of the bridge which reported items for maintenance and repair required to preserve the structure.[11]

13. 3 REFERENCES

Lyons, N., Heritage Assessment of the Poole Street Footbridge West Northam (for the Avon Valley Environmental Society Inc, November 1994).

Margetts, L.L., Inspection Notes, Footbridges - Northam and Collie (for Main Roads, May 1995).

9 The iron handrail seems a replacement as timber was more commonly use in the early 1900s.

10 See Lyons, N., 'Heritage Assessment of the Poole Street Footbridge West Northam' (for the Avon Valley Environmental Society Inc, November 1994) for inspection report by Halpern Glick Maunsell, Appendix A.

11 See Heritage Council of Western Australia, File No. 4549 for inspection notes.