



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. 1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Cue Shire Offices, by means of its stonework, Victorian Georgian style and handsome proportions is an attractive building with high aesthetic value. (Criterion 1.2)

The prominent position of *Cue Shire Offices* on the main street of Cue and its physical dominance as one of the few two-storey buildings in Cue make it significant to the community as a landmark. (Criterion 1.3)

The walls of locally quarried stone are consistent with many other buildings in Cue and together they create a consistent texture and pattern in the precinct. (Criterion 1.4)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Cue Shire Offices has historic value in that it formed the premises of the 'Gentleman's Club' which formed part of the early society in Cue. (Criterion 2.1)

Cue Shire Offices are a significant reminder of the years when Cue was the focus of the surrounding districts. The *Cue Shire Offices* also demonstrate the nature of the boom time in gold mining towns. The characteristic solid and expensive materials of construction belie the impermanent nature of the industry. (Criterion 2.2)

Cue Shire Offices are associated with the former President of the United States of America from 1929 to 1933, Herbert Hoover, who worked as a mining engineer in the district. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The role of *Cue Shire Offices* as the former Gentlemen's Club has a significant value for the community of Cue. This Club was one of the main sites for the development of male social and cultural life in the town of Cue and surrounding districts. (Criterion 4.1)

The efforts of the Cue community in initiating the substantial reconstruction of original fabric has social value worthy of note. (Criterion 4.1)

Cue Shire Offices contribute to the community's sense of place because it is evidence of the confidence and prosperity which established the town of Cue. *Cue Shire Offices* are also the centre of local government in the region. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Cue Shire Offices is an uncommon surviving example of a two-storey office building of the late 19th century in Cue. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The size and prominent position of *Cue Shire Offices*. are representative of an office building in a mining boom town. (Criterion 6.1)

Cue Shire Offices demonstrates the confidence of local private enterprise in the new town of Cue. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Cue Shire Offices is in good condition. The recent reconstruction is of good quality and the original fabric is sound.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The integrity of *Cue Shire Offices* is high. The building was designed as an office building with two shops. Today it is an office building with one shop and a library.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The reconstruction carried out in recent times has involved the removal of original fabric and the insertion of modern materials. Authenticity is fair.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Prue Griffin, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect.

Curtilage should extend to one metre out from external walls, verandahs, the shop enclosure and the rear loading balcony, as indicated by the dotted line on the ground floor plan.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Cue Shire Offices is a two-storey stone building flanked by single-storey shops built in 1895.¹

Cue was established as a result of a gold find reported by Tom Cue in 1892. The location known colloquially as 'The Patch' rapidly filled with prospectors. In 1892, up to one thousand men were fossicking in an area approximately 3 kilometres by 2 kilometres. Conditions were tough, water was scarce and enteric fever swept the camps. A hospital committee was formed to care for the sick but real relief came on 13 May 1892 when water was finally struck in a well dug at the site of the present rotunda. A Progress Committee was formed in 1893 and the townsite of Cue was gazetted on 17 August 1893.² From 1893 the townsite rapidly expanded with substantial public and private buildings erected.³ Government had proved its faith in the town by undertaking the construction of its public buildings at the end of 1894. Private companies followed their lead and the solid *Cue Shire Offices* are an example of the confidence with which investors viewed the future of Cue.⁴

The London Western Australian Investment Company provided the capital for the erection of the building which they named 'The Murchison Chambers'. Designed by Alfred Edward Cox, the only architect in Cue at the time, the buildings were especially suited for the sultry climate of Cue.⁵ Built of local stone and corrugated iron by contractors Atkins and Law, the original buildings consisted of an eighteen room office building with two shops.⁶ The first upstairs tenant of 'The Murchison Chambers' were surveyors Fox, Weekes and May.⁷

At approximately the same time as the construction of 'The Murchison Chambers' local citizens formed a Club known as the Murchison Club. This club enabled the leading business, mining, pastoral and professional men in the town to gather and exchange views. The quality of its membership meant that this group quickly became known as 'The Gentlemen's Club', possibly also to distinguish itself from the Murchison Club Hotel.

The Gentlemen's Club moved to the first floor of 'The Murchison Chambers' on 5 January 1901, having outgrown their original premises in Darlot Street.⁸

¹ *Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette* 3 July 1895, p. 2.

² Conversation with June Gronow of the Geographic Names Section of the Department of Land Administration, 17 March 1997.

³ Heydon, P. R. *Just a Century Ago A History of the Shire of Cue* Hesperian Press, 1987, p. 6-7.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Hope, George 'Murchison Goldfields' supplement to *Geraldton Express*, 1897, part 1, p. 43.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸ Suba, T. *Municipal Inventory of the Shire of Cue* place No. 19, 1995.

Since 1901, the building has been referred to as the 'Gentlemen's Club' even though this has never been an official title.

In 1909, the club purchased 'Murchison Chambers' from the renamed London and Australian Investment Company Ltd. It has been suggested by the National Trust that the owners in 1909 were the Engineering firm Bewick Moreing and Company, but the Certificate of Title does not support this.⁹ Bewick Moreing were tenants of the building and of interest was an employee of theirs, mining engineer Herbert Hoover who had rooms there. Hoover was President of the United States of America in later years from 1929 to 1933.¹⁰ In 1926, the Murchison Club sold the building to pastoralists, the Clarkson Bros., and the property has changed hands many times since then.¹¹

The building deteriorated as the town subsided into a virtual ghost town. Cyclone Ingrid removed the roof in 1970.¹² Apart from the damage caused by the elements, vandalism has been a big problem to the town. Many major buildings have been subject to this abuse. Travellers through the town often commented on the sad decay of this building.

...the once -renowned Gentleman's club needs prompt action to save it. It is an excellent example of period architecture and has long historical associations.¹³

In 1979, the Shire of Cue spent \$8,000 on the building to make it a site for a local museum. This decision was prompted by the realisation of the decay to the building and a mini tourist boom of fossickers in the area. At this time it was recognised that insurance companies would no longer insure the deserted buildings.¹⁴

By the 1980s, it was apparent that major work needed to be done on *Cue Shire Offices*. In 1982, the Health Surveyor's inspection of the building stated:

From first observations it is obvious that this grand old building of yesteryear has seen better days. Moreso it has reached a state of disrepair whereby sections are crumbling and stones are now becoming dislodged and falling to the ground. Urgent remedial action is required to save this building and possibly the public who venture too close. Failure to act immediately will result in demolition.¹⁵

On 5 September 1984 a special meeting of the Shire Council was held to discuss the restoration of *Cue Shire Offices*. The Council resolved that three options for renovations be considered by the meeting. The alternatives were a Shire complex with function rooms; a social centre and function rooms or a tourism/museum complex with function rooms. Public access to the buildings was seen as a priority by the Council. Plans for the restoration of the buildings were submitted by Perth architect, Rob McK Campbell, but the cost was prohibitive to the Council so an alternative was sought. In November, engineers Hardcastle and Richards were approached to provide a

⁹ Certificate of Title, Volume 364 Folio 87, Department of Land Administration.

¹⁰ *National Trust Newsletter* April 1975 p. 2.

¹¹ Certificates of Title, Volume 364 Folio 87, Volume 1219 Folio 901, and Volume 56 Folio 125, Department of Land Administration.

¹² *National Trust Newsletter* April 1975 p. 2.

¹³ *The West Australian* 24 May 1968, p. 4.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 20 October 1979, p. 20.

¹⁵ Heydon, P. R. *Just a Century Ago* p. 141

scope of works for the structural restoration of the building and a public meeting endorsed these actions. Work began on the restoration project in 1985.¹⁶ In 1991, architectural firm Considine and Griffiths were commissioned to research and document details of the original verandah which was subsequently reconstructed.

The building was purchased by Shire of Cue in November 1986 and extensively renovated to serve as the current Shire Offices.¹⁷ The choice of this building indicates the high regard in which it was held by the local community. The Shire remains in occupancy of the building.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Cue Shire Offices is situated on the north-western side of Austin Street, approximately 20 metres south-west of the junction with Victoria Street. *Cue Shire Offices* consists mainly of the central two-storey offices of the Shire of Cue. The office building is rectangular in plan, with the long axis at right angles to Austin Street. Immediately adjacent and south-west of the offices is the single-storey Shire Library, reached by an interconnecting door from the shire offices and also by an entrance from Austin Street. The library is basically rectangular in plan with the long axis at right angles to Austin Street, and approximately one quarter of the floor area of the shire offices. On the north side of the shire office is a single-storey snack shop which in plan and composition is a mirror image of the library, but without an interconnecting door. It would appear that the shire office and library are on Lot 2 and the shop is on Lot 1. For the purposes of this assessment *Cue Shire Offices* refers to the library, the offices and the shop as they are architecturally one building.

Directly opposite *Cue Shire Offices*, on the south-eastern side of Austin Street, is the Murchison Club Hotel. Diagonally opposite is the Post Office. To the North of the Post Office and forming part of the same building is the Police Station. South west of *Cue Shire Offices* is a small paved area which forms the Arthur Stanley Gurvey Memorial Park, adjacent to which are some vacant shops. To the north, across Victoria Street is a vacant lot, beyond which is a public telephone shelter and the Cue Caravan Park. The land to the rear of *Cue Shire Offices* on both lots 1 and 2 is otherwise vacant.

Cue Shire Offices is a porphyry Victorian Georgian building, with a symmetrical elevation and largely symmetrical plan. Together with the porphyry Post Office and Police Station building, *Cue Shire Offices* defines the end of the north-eastern central precinct of Cue. Also, by means of its scale, *Cue Shire Offices* punctuates the north eastern end of the long section of covered footpath that extends for about a hundred metres along the north-western side of Austin Street and terminates at the Arthur Stanley Gurvey Memorial Park.

A two-storey timber verandah extends the full width of the front of the two storey central administrative section of *Cue Shire Offices*. The hipped corrugated zincalume roof of the verandah connects to the main structure immediately below a stucco string course and cornice. The cornice, with a string course near the top, is about one metre high, extends the full width of

¹⁶ ibid, p. 144-145.

¹⁷ Certificate of Title Volume 1746 Folio 764, Department of Land Administration.

the front of the two-storey offices, and is divided into three sections by stucco pilasters, with the end bays wider than the central bay. The central bay is further defined by a geometric stucco motif, and also by the two central pilasters which rise another metre and contain a flat stucco pediment with a horizontal rectangular stucco panel.

There are six openings in the two-storey central part of the facade, consisting of two windows to each side of the central door that occurs both at ground and first floor levels. The main entrance door is set back from the main front wall line, and the resultant flat headed opening in the front wall plane has a voussoir similar but lower to the flat headed windows to each side.

The first floor glazed timber door leads from the council chambers on to the verandah. The three openings on the first floor have rendered hood moulds, which for the windows are unusual in that they are fouled by the sloping hipped roof of the verandah. This would lead one to assume that the reconstructed hipped roof is not in accordance with the original design, but an inspection of file photographs of the original structure shows that this detail is in fact original. All four windows to the front of the two-storey shire offices have sliding sashes, consisting of one pane per sash.

The front facades of the library and shop have large areas of glazing and a lean-to zincalume colourbond roof, similar to the other shops in Austin Street. The glazing is typically in the same plane as the shire office front wall, but in plan angles in at about 45 degrees to form recessed entries adjacent to the shire offices, articulating both the transition between the stonework of the offices and the rendered walls of the shop and library, and also the higher floor level of the shire office. The shop and library have floor levels approximately at the same height as the pavement, whereas the floor level of the shire offices is about 300 mm above pavement level.

The blank parapet walls on the south elevation of the library are porphyry stone, however the mortar is smeared over the stone in an unsightly manner. The south elevation of the offices has six windows, two to the ground floor and four on the first floor, with brick quoins and headers to the segmentally arched window heads. The windows are sliding sashes with two panes per sash. Two brick chimneys, with their outer walls in the same plane as the main stone wall beneath rise to about a metre above the parapet wall. The tops of the chimneys are rendered.

The north elevation of the offices and shop is similar to the south elevation of the offices and library, except that the window to the stairs is above landing height, and is therefore about a metre lower than the other first floor windows. Also the shop has cool rooms, a shed and a concrete block toilet, all enclosed by a chain link fence with barbed wire at the top.

The north-west or rear elevation of the shire offices consists of a gabled parapet wall, and two central doors, one on each floor. The upper door leads on to a small loading balcony. The rear of both the library and shop has a centrally located window and a door adjacent to the shire offices. The lean-to roofs over the library and shop rake away from the shire offices to a box gutter.

Internally the layout on the ground floor consists of a central corridor leading from the front door to the rear door, with five rooms on either side. Halfway

down the central corridor is a hallway with a staircase that leads to the first floor. The four front rooms are offices, the rooms opposite and adjacent to the stairs are store rooms, the rear two rooms have been converted to male and female toilets, and the room adjacent to the male toilet is a store room. The front office on the south-west side has two steps leading down to the library which has an office at the rear. The shop has an identical though mirrored layout, except that the rear room has been fitted out as a kitchen.

Structurally, the layout of the first floor is such that all walls are directly supported by ground floor walls. The layout of the first floor is as follows: The council chambers are adjacent to the stairs and at the front of the building, and give access to the shire president's office and also to the front verandah. Leading off the shire chambers is also a refreshment room. Opposite the stairs is a kitchen, and adjacent to the kitchen are two meeting rooms. Adjacent to the stairs is an office, next to which is an archive room.

Internally, there is no evidence of the original layout being substantially altered. Typically, the timber floors are carpeted, however in the central hallway, modern narrow floorboards are exposed and it is probable that these have been incorporated elsewhere. In a number of rooms the original skirtings have been removed and not replaced, or replaced with low modern skirtings. The walls are original plaster, however a number of fireplaces have been blocked over and the walls made good. The biggest departure from the original materials are the ceilings, which consists typically of 2400 mm by 1200 mm vermiculated panels in an exposed T bar suspension system, with integrated 600 mm by 600 mm air-conditioning louvres. The height of the ceilings is lower than that of the original, with the ceilings being positioned as low as possible without fouling the window heads, presumably to allow as much space as possible in the ceiling voids for air-conditioning ducting. Typically the ceiling height is about 3.3 metres. Electrical wiring to ceiling lights on the ground floor consists of exposed conduits clipped to the walls, rising vertically from the light switch to the ceiling, however on the first floor pull-cord switches have been used which is a far more satisfactory detail. Light fittings generally consist of 1200 mm long fluorescent tubes with a plastic prismatic diffuser, however a number of the first floor offices have suspended incandescent lights and shades.

13. 3 REFERENCES

Campbell, R. McK., 'Conservation Survey The Austin Street Precinct at Cue' prepared for the WA Heritage Committee, May 1985.

National Trust Assessment Exposition 2 March 1982.

13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH
