



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*

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is a fine example of the Federation Academic Classical style. The aesthetic qualities portrayed by the classical features of the central portico and handsome, rhythmical facades express a confident, but conservative image, in keeping with the civic function. (Criterion 1.1)

The corner location, relative isolation from other buildings and imposing architectural style of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* contribute to the landmark quality of the place in the Geraldton townscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) represents a milestone in the development of the city of Geraldton, and the importance of civic life in the early years of this century. (Criterion 2.1)

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) demonstrates the confidence experienced during the prosperous gold boom period in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) was designed by well known Western Australian architects Charles Oldham and Alfred Cox. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is highly valued by the city's residents for its cultural and social associations, as demonstrated by the formation of the Friends of the Old Town Hall to save *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* from demolition. (Criterion 4.1)

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) has dominated the Geraldton city streetscape since 1907 and contributes extensively to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is one of the few public buildings from the gold boom era remaining in Geraldton. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is representative of the Federation Academic Classical style of architecture which was a common stylistic idiom used for civic buildings in Western Australia following the gold boom. (Criterion 6.1)

The architectural style and setting of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* contribute to an impressive external expression for this building which is a focal point of civic activity, and is representative of the significance of Geraldton as a regional centre within the State. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is in good condition and has been well maintained since the conversion of the building into a regional art gallery in 1984. There are some problems associated with rising damp in the external walls and patches of the ceiling plaster are deteriorating.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

With the opening of a new civic centre in 1964, the original municipal function of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* was changed; however, the building has remained a centre of community activity since construction and displays moderate integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The interior of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* has low authenticity as it was severely modified when the building was converted to an art gallery. The exterior shell is authentic although the arcade is intrusive, and the building has been extended at the rear. Overall the building has moderate authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr), a two-storey rendered brick building, with an asbestos roof (originally galvanised corrugated iron), was constructed in the Federation Academic Classical style in 1907, for the Geraldton Town Council.¹ In 1984, *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* was converted to an Art Gallery.

Geraldton developed as a port for the Murchison mineral fields to the north and a centre for the rich pastoral and agricultural lands in the Victoria district. The first lead deposit was discovered in 1848, and the Geraldine lead mine opened the following year. It was named by Governor Sir Charles Fitzgerald after his family home, Geraldine House, in Kilkeo, County Clare.² According to the Municipality of Geraldton's 1950 centenary publication, the township of Geraldton took its name from the mine.³

Geraldton was surveyed in November 1849, and the first forty town lots went to auction in June 1850.⁴ The harbour was originally known as Port Grey, after Captain George Grey who explored the area in 1839. It was renamed Champion Bay, after H M Colonial Schooner *Champion*, which transported Governor Fitzgerald and his wife, and explorer and Assistant Surveyor Augustus Gregory, to the area in 1849, and which also transported the first settlers and a detachment of soldiers to the new township, in 1850.

As the port for the surrounding mining and pastoral regions, Geraldton grew steadily. The Geraldton Hotel was built in 1862, and Henry Gray, a farmer from Greenough, opened Gray's Store, which was the point of departure for the wagon teams that serviced the Murchison district at this time. In 1867, the Court House and Bond Store was opened, and the Rectory was constructed.

In 1871, the Geraldton Town Trust was incorporated to administer the town, with the position of Chairman analogous to that of Mayor.⁵ The Trust occupied the old Pensioner Barracks in Gregory Street.⁶ In 1896, Geraldton was declared a municipality and competitive designs were sought for a town hall, but little further action was taken at the time. However, new Municipal Chambers, costing £1,162, were built on the corner of Eleanor and Durlacher Streets, on Lot 384, Reserve 3197. The building was opened on 10 June 1896.⁷

¹ Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1994, pp.100-103.

² *The First Hundred Years: Geraldton Centenary 1850-1950* Municipality of Geraldton, [1950], pp.5-7.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*, pp.14-16; *Opening of the Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)*, Friday 12th July 1907 Souvenir booklet, p. 3.

⁶ Bain, M. A. *A Life of it's Own City* of Geraldton, 1996, p.292.

⁷ *ibid.*

In November 1905, the proposal to erect a town hall was revived by Mayor F. G. Armstrong, and on 22 March 1906, a plan was tabled showing that a town hall could be built without further taxing ratepayers. A referendum held on 17 May that year, returned a result of 2/1 in favour of building a new town hall.⁸ But questions were raised about finance and another referendum was called for 23 October 1906, to authorise the raising of a loan of £3,500. The following advertisement appeared in the Geraldton Guardian the week before the referendum:

Vote for the Town Hall loan because Geraldton needs a Town Hall to increase its importance, provide good public accommodation, add to its attractions and encourage frequent entertainments. Because: the cost adds no fresh burdens, interferes with no other public work or water supply, the Government will contribute 20 per cent towards cost, and Because it will be a revenue producing investment. Also, Because it will be an evidence of progress, self-reliance and pride in their town. Therefore all public spirited voters should support the loan.⁹

The referendum was carried and tenders for debentures called for the loan. It was fully subscribed by local residents, and the Government provided £800 as its twenty per cent share of the cost as agreed.

Architects for *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* were Oldham and Cox, and James Brownlie was awarded the building contract with a tender of £3,778. *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* was built between the Municipal Chambers and the corner of Eleanor (now Chapman Road) and Durlacher Streets, on the remainder of Reserve 3197 granted by the Government for the purpose. The foundation stone was laid on 28 January 1907, by Sir Edward Horne Wittenoom.¹⁰ The style of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* matched that of the Municipal Chambers.¹¹

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) was opened on 12 July 1907, by Governor Sir Frederick Bedford. Other ceremonies to mark the occasion included a 'Torchlight Procession of Public Bodies...consist[ing] of the Infantry, Cadets, Fire Brigade, and local Friendly and Industrial societies', and a 'Grand Representative Concert' in the newly opened building where the Geraldton Orchestra, Geraldton City Band, and local schools presented items.¹²

The construction of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* emphasised the confidence and prosperity of the gold boom period. It was built to accommodate 1100 people, 700 in the main hall and 400 in the galleries. Furnishings for the building cost £400, and included a Brinsmead grand piano. *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* was used for concerts, dances, exhibitions, film shows, civic functions and plays, as well as being the headquarters of the Citizen's Advice Bureau.¹³

⁸ *Opening of the Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* op. cit., p.3.

⁹ *Geraldton Guardian* 19 October 1906, p.6.

¹⁰ Foundation stone as photographed by Katrina Chisholm; *Geraldton Guardian* 29 January 1907, p.2. Sir Edward Wittenoom was a prominent pastoralist and stock agent and member of both the Northampton and Murchison Roads Boards. He was a Member for the Legislative Council on three occasions: 1894-1898, 1902-1906 and 1910-1934.

¹¹ Photograph, Battye Library No. BA528/414, (See supporting material). Note: The date of the demolition of the Municipal Chambers is not known. The building may have been occupied by the council until 1964, when they moved to the new Civic Centre.

¹² *Opening of the Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* op. cit., pp.1 & 5.

¹³ Bain, M. A, op. cit., p.297.

A new Civic Centre was built in Geraldton and opened by Queen Elizabeth II in March 1964. Council offices moved to the new building, which also houses the Geraldton Library. *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* continued to be used for various functions, but ultimately it came under threat of demolition to make way for a car park. A lobby group, Friends of the Old Town Hall, was formed to prevent its demolition.¹⁴

A suggestion for a new use for the building as an Art Gallery was put forward. Working together, the State Government, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Geraldton Town Council came up with a workable plan to convert *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* to a regional Art Gallery. Following a referendum among the people of Geraldton, the exterior appearance of the building was retained with some renovation. Internally, *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* was gutted and converted to a modern exhibition facility, complete with air conditioning and security services. The alterations were designed by local architect Lewis Eves.¹⁵

Funding, totalling \$870,000, was provided. The State Government contributed \$525,000 through the Wage-Pause Programme, \$34,000 came from instant lottery, and the remaining \$311,000 was raised by the Geraldton Town Council.¹⁶

The Geraldton Art Gallery was opened by the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen on 6 August, 1984. The opening exhibition was 'The Land Beyond Time' consisting of 100 of John Olsen's 1982-83 works on the Pilbara and Kimberley regions.¹⁷

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Geraldton Town Hall (fmr) is a two-storey, rectangular, building constructed in the Federation Academic Classical style.¹⁸ The building is located on a flat site in the city centre on the southern corner of Durlacher Street and Chapman Road. A grass verge with three well established palm trees and bordered by a brick fence with wrought iron railings, sets the building back from Durlacher Street. Similarly, the adjacent block to the south is landscaped with low planting providing a visual buffer to the other buildings on Chapman Road. Due to road widening by the council, the front facade is very close to the kerb on Chapman Road with a visually intrusive safety rail, stationed between the building and the kerb, stretching across the front facade. A free standing S.E.C. substation with an external finish matching the *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* is located within the landscaped strip on Durlacher Street. A brick toilet block is connected to the south corner of the building by an overhead space frame which provides a covered loading area.

The relative isolation from neighbouring buildings serves to reinforce the civic importance of the Town Hall.¹⁹ The rectangular building is symmetrical

¹⁴ *West Australian* 9 February 1987, p.47.

¹⁵ *West Australian* 7 August 1984, p.15; *Country Copy* W.A. Arts Council, September 1984, p.7.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Apperly, R. Irving, R., Reynolds, P. op. cit., pp.100-103.

¹⁹ Early photographs show Municipal Chambers situated immediately adjacent to *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* on Chapman Road. The chambers were opened in 1897 and are likely to have

with the pilastrated facades and repetitive elements expressing a pleasing rhythmical formality. The overall expression conveys a sense of grandeur but is more conservative than ostentatious, implying civic pride in the institution and growth of the region at the time of construction. The nearby Railway Station (1915) and Courthouse (1898) are of the same form of expression, and together with the *Town Hall*, comprise a pleasing streetscape.

The facades are composed of double height pilasters supporting the entablature and roof parapet which conceals the gabled roof. Windows are located in each bay with half round arched openings at the upper level and square topped openings below. Doors have been inserted in select bays at both levels of the side elevations. The front facade is dominated by a pedimented portico with decorative infill and a central skyline feature. A smaller pediment supported on moulded, corbelled brackets is located over the former entry bay. Wrought iron fixings on the sides of this central opening are indicative of former gates in this location. A single-storey arcade has been formed in the bay immediately behind the front facade allowing pedestrian access across the width of the building, in place of the footpath at the front which has been engulfed by road widening. A double-sided clock, still in working order, projects from the entablature. The plain walled, rear extension is lower than the main body of the building and has double service entry doors in the south-west elevation.

Two curved canvas canopies emphasise the public entrance to the building located in the north-east elevation, facing Durlacher Street. Aluminium doors give access to the front reception and gallery shop which receives prominent public attention situated behind the aluminium framed glazing to the front arcade. An internal gallery office is adjacent to the central stairwell to the upper floor. Two further offices for the Gallery director and assistant, and a staff toilet are located along the south-west elevation at the front section of the building. Plasterboard partitions and storerooms divide the main display area with work, store and staff rooms and an escape stair located in the rear extension. The floor is carpeted with the original timber floor retained in the central section. New concrete slab floors have been incorporated in the front and rear sections of the building. The ceiling is suspended plasterboard with a square void over the central area to the floor above. A false plasterboard wall has been fitted to sections of the external wall to screen the windows and provide uniform lighting conditions and hanging facilities throughout the gallery. A small photograph hanging on the wall by the front entrance door provides some interpretative evidence of the original internal fitout of the Town Hall.

The concrete staircase to the first floor and the balustrade around the central void incorporate some of the original joinery used in the Town Hall gallery. Additional turned jarrah balusters supplement the existing newel posts and balusters. The new concrete slab floor provides a substantially larger floor area than the original gallery which supported raked seating to view the stage area at ground floor. New full height plasterboard partitions enclose the ventilation duct work and false walls have been placed across external

influenced the style of *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)*. It is not known when the chambers were demolished.

windows as for the ground floor. A small cinema, 'Video Paradiso', which has a built-up, raked timber floor, has been built in the east corner of the building with the escape stair and uncovered air conditioning plant area located behind. Plaster cornices, and ceiling mouldings which may be original, have been retained in the west corner. The mechanism for the clock suspended from the front facade, is enclosed within an acrylic case and is partially visible from the public area. The clock is still in working order, if wound regularly, although the time between the two faces may vary by a few minutes.

While the exterior displays much of the original form, there have been substantial alterations to the building interior in the transformation of function. As well as the changes outlined in the preceding paragraphs documentary evidence shows there were once external access stairs to the north-east elevation and an addition at the rear with a lean-to roof. Contemporary artificial lighting and temperature control have had to be installed but the art gallery function has been accommodated satisfactorily within the building envelope. Attempts to retain some of the original Town Hall features have been made as illustrated by the central void.

The *Geraldton Town Hall (fmr)* is in good condition and well maintained. There are some problems associated with rising damp evident at the base of the external walls on the south-west elevation and there are areas of flaking plaster on the ceilings.

13. 3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH
