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 November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11. 1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

As a building designed for the particular requirements of the coastal wireless network that was established in Australia in 1912-1914, the place has an aesthetic quality that distinguishes it from other buildings constructed in the region in the same period. (Criterion 1.2)

The site has landmark qualities that result from the distinctive form of the building, its corner location and landscaped setting. (Criterion 1.3)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

As part of the network of coastal wireless stations established by the Commonwealth Government, the building contributed to the betterment of life over a 54-year period. It provided for communication between merchant shipping and the mainland, enhanced the safety of vessels at sea, facilitated the transmission of information in wartime, and formed part of the remote area communications network, which operated through the Outpost Radio Service. (Criterion 2.1)

During World War I, the wireless station fulfilled an essential role in the defence of Australian and British territory by monitoring wireless transmissions from ships. During World War II, this role was expanded to embrace wireless traffic associated with the movement of aircraft and the evacuation of military personnel and civilians from Asia. (Criterion 2.2)

The use of concrete for the floor slab and walls of the building demonstrates a high level of technical achievement at a time when Broome buildings generally comprised timber or iron structural frames clad with sheets of corrugated iron. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* , Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

The place demonstrates the type and positioning of buildings used for coastal wireless communications in Western Australia during the first half of the twentieth century. The research undertaken to establish the role of the building in this context has the potential to contribute to a wider understanding of telecommunications in the locality, the region and the State. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The place is valued by both the local and visiting lawn bowling fraternities whose efforts were responsible for the disused wireless station being preserved, renovated and adapted as a sporting facility. (Criterion 4.1)

The building, in its landscaped setting, contributes to the community's sense of place by providing an attractive sporting and recreational facility. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The building is a comparatively rare example of a concrete structure built in the far north of Western Australia. Only five coastal wireless stations were constructed in the State, and Broome Bowling Club is one of the three places that are believed to be extant. (Criterion 5.1)

The building was one of nineteen coastal wireless stations constructed in Australia and New Guinea between 1912 and 1914 and, as such, was an integral part of a communications system based on technology that has since become obsolete. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The unusual form of the place, where separation of the two buildings creates a breezeway, is representative of the design used for the construction of coastal wireless stations in Western Australia in the period 1912-1914. While the breezeway and encircling verandah appear representative of tropical construction, they are also features of the former wireless station situated at Esperance on the southern coast. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

The condition of the buildings is fair to good, reflecting the level of maintenance since the renovation and adaptation of 1981.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The removal of the telecommunications equipment has diminished evidence of the early function, but some of this equipment can be seen at the Broome Historical Museum.

The Bowling Club has been accommodated satisfactorily within the original form of the building and is therefore a compatible use.

Overall, the place has moderate integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Although the building has been modified in the adaptation from disused wireless station to bowling club, much of the original fabric remains and the place has a moderate to high level of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Cathie Clement, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Taylor, Architect.

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Broome Bowling Clu*b, comprising two concrete walled buildings with a corrugated iron roof, was built by a Public Works team for the Postmaster-General's Department (PMG) in 1913. Designed as a 'Radio Telegraph Station', it closely resembled newly-completed stations at Geraldton and Esperance and others that would soon be built at Roebourne and Wyndham.[1]

The construction of the Wyndham station (no longer extant) completed a network of nineteen stations built in 1912-1914. Eighteen were on the Australian coast or adjacent islands and one was in Port Moresby. The Broome station was one of the less powerful stations which, coupled with the long-range stations at Sydney and Perth (Wireless Hill), used wireless technology and Morse code to communicate with merchant ships in Australian waters. There was also communication with passenger ships which, under the 1912 Navigation Act—proclaimed in the year the British liner *Titanic* sank—had to be equipped for wireless telegraphy if leaving Australian ports with more than 50 passengers.[2]

Within Australia, telegraphic communication had been available since 1854. The landlines had first appeared in Victoria and, less than two decades later, a message sent from Normanton in far north Queensland could travel to places that included Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Launceston, Adelaide and Port Darwin. A submarine cable was in place to carry a message from Port Darwin to Java, and from there it could continue to India, Europe and England. Perth joined this network late in 1877 with the connection, at Eucla, of the South Australian and Western Australian telegraph lines.[3] Mile after mile of landline then crept northward from Perth until, in 1889, the line reached Broome. The simultaneous connection of Broome and Java by submarine cable provided an alternative to the Adelaide-Port Darwin-Java communications route and was the catalyst that turned a base camp for pearlers into a town.[4]

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1 National Archives of Australia (Vic), MP341/1, 1916/755, Wireless . Broome; National Archives of Australia (WA), K1201/1, WA16853, Radio Telegraph Station – Roebourne – Broome, and WA16886, Wyndham – Radio Station, and WA16888, Esperance - Radio Telegraph Station, and WE6017, Geraldton – Coastal Radio Station. It is noted that the documentary evidence presented here is primarily a summary of information presented by Heritage and Conservation Professionals and National Heritage in 'Broome Bowling Club (Former Wireless Station): Conservation Plan', prepared for the Broome Bowling Club, with funding provided by the Lotteries Commission, April 1998. Some portions of the text also use information collected by Tanya Suba for documentation undertaken for the Heritage Council of Western Australia in 1997.

2 Lawrence Durrant, *The Seawatchers: The Story of Australia's Coast Radio Service*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, North Ryde (NSW), 1986, pp. 20, 22 and 23.

3 Ann Moyal, *Clear Across Australia: A History of Telecommunications*, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 15–18, 19-21, 23, 29-30, 51, 53 and 56-60.

4 For coverage of the establishment of the telegraphic services and the town of Broome, see Heritage and Conservation Professionals, 'Conservation Plan: Broome Court House (Former

When the Eastern Extension, Australasia and China Telegraph Company, Limited (referred to as the E.E.T. Company) decided to land its cable at Roebuck Bay, it paved the way for Broome to develop a distinctive townscape. The company imported the elegant "Cable House", a prefabricated building consisting of an iron structural frame, external walls and ventilated roof clad in corrugated iron, internal walls and ceilings lined with teak panelling, and a verandah featuring decorative cast iron posts with cast iron balustrading. This building (now *Broome Courthouse*) housed the staff who operated the cable and influenced the design of other Broome buildings, for example the court house which was built in 1895-96.[5] Its influence was also evident in the new post and telegraph office built by the Western Australian Government in 1896-97. That building provided office space for the cable staff until the E.E.T. Company removed its Broome cable in March 1914, and it continued to provide office space and quarters for the post and telegraph office staff until it was demolished in 1961.[6] The removal of the cable came about because, firstly, the opening of cables between Adelaide, Perth and the Cocos Islands early in 1902 limited the company's use of the unreliable Perth-Broome landline for international traffic, and secondly, a tightening of Australia's immigration laws limited its access to Asian and Indian servants.[7]

When the Public Works team arrived in Broome to build the coastal wireless station in 1913, the town had a population of about 3,300 (Aboriginal people excluded). It boasted a 'white' residential section dominated by single-story bungalows with broad verandahs, a business section, and what was known as the "Asiatic quarter". A tram ran from the cattle-shipping jetty at Mangrove Point (completed in 1897/1898) to the business centre, where stores catered mostly to people involved in the pearl shell fishing industry.[8] Widespread use of corrugated iron for the walls of the bungalows, hotels and stores showed the influence of 'Cable House' but there were also several places in which concrete had been used instead. A mercantile firm sold one of these buildings (now Broome Historical Museum) to the government in 1910 and, situated beside the tramline some distance from the jetty and equipped with walls 1 foot (30 centimetres) thick and 12 feet (3.66 metres) high, it became the Customs House.[9] A concrete residence known as "Sea View" (no longer extant) stood to the north of the Customs House,[10] and foot-thick concrete

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Cable Station)', prepared for The Building Management Authority, WA, February 1996, pp. 12-20.

5 ibid., pp. 37-42.

6 R.McK. Campbell, 'The Broome Cable Station Courthouse: An Interim Conservation Report', held by Conservation and Management Services Library, p. 4; *Western Mail*, 11 February 1898, p. 26; and 'Linemen Turn Archaeologists', typescript, 2 pp., held by Kevin Kenneally and possibly produced by the Post and Telecom Museum, Perth.

7 Public Records Office of Western Australia, AN 2/1, Premiers Department, Acc 1496, 38/1912, File.

8 *Western Australia Post Office Directory*, 1913, p. 48; *Sunday Times*, 10 May 1914, p. 22; and *Western Mail*, 11 February 1898, p. 26, and 8 April 1898, p. 5.

9 HCWA File 0303, Broome Historical Museum / Customs House, research notes prepared by Ian Elliot, Archival Research Officer, 9 November 1993.

10 The information that "Sea View" was of concrete construction comes from Kevin Lawton (personal communication to Cathie Clement, May 1998). It is possible that "Sea View" was Sydney Pigott's concrete residence, which was for sale in October 1912 and described as 'the best house and position in Broome' (Iris Francis, *Broome: a pictorial history*, Access Press, Northbridge, 1992, p. 11). Tom Chapple, Broome - The Exciting Years 1912 - 1930 , p. 55, lists

walls also existed in commercial premises on Short Street.[11] The presence of these buildings was, however, coincidental to the decision to use concrete for the wireless station construction.

Public Works drawings for the wireless stations at Broome, Roebourne, Geraldton, Esperance and Wyndham show a two-building design in which one building comprised the transmitting house and the other, across the breezeway, comprised the power house. At Broome, the transmitting house was the southern building and it was there that the operators worked. The northern building, in addition to housing the power supply, also provided an office for the station master.[12] The stations other than Sydney and Perth used radio equipment known as the Balsillie system, and a man who was involved in its installation at Geraldton recalled that the 'mast at Geraldton, and at most other coastal radio stations to be installed, was 180 ft. high, comprised of oregon slabs 6" X 2" joined together to make a mast about 18" square'.[13]

When the PMG took possession of the stations, it staffed them with operators drawn from the landlines. These men had to be:

(a) capable of working at 25 words per minute, send and receive;

(b) possessed of a general knowledge of precedents in working radiotelegraphy as contained in the Handbook for Wireless Telegraphists issued by British Postal authorities;

(c) possessed of an elementary knowledge of the workings of internal combustion engines.[14]

By 1915, the operators also needed 'an elementary knowledge of electricity and magnetism and the basic principles of radiotelegraphy' as well as a 'thorough knowledge of the care and management of primary and secondary batteries'.[15]

The Broome wireless station had a telephone link to the post and telegraph office but, in general, the two facilities operated independently. Both used Morse code to send and receive messages but, because they used different technology, the sound of the Morse differed. Most messages handled by the

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Lot 268 as 'Residence of the Sewell family, later purchased by Piggott' but Chapple (personal communication to Cathie Clement, May 1998) recalls that residence as a typical Broome house constructed of corrugated iron with a breezeway and timber verandah. The Western Australia Legislative Assembly Electoral Roll, Kimberley Electoral District (Amalgamated), 30 June, 1923, lists 'Sea View, the Esplanade' as the address for a Broome Wireless Station radiotelegraphist, William George Chapman, and his wife, Affra.

11 The Short Street structure is said by Peter Kelleher, *Historic Buildings of the Kimberley Region of W.A.*, 1988, p. 81, to have been a former bank that became part of Streeter and Male's stores. Kevin Lawton, 'Pearling affluence brought solid design trend for beating the heat', *Broome Advertiser*, 13 May 1998, p. 26, also mentions this structure, and subsequent personal contact with Lawton elicited the information that it is situated between the former hardware and grocery stores.

12 National Archives of Australia (WA), K1201/1, WA16853, Radio Telegraph Station – Roebourne – Broome, and WA16886, Wyndham - Radio Station, and WA16888, Esperance - Radio Telegraph Station, and WE6017, Geraldton - Coastal Radio Station; and information provided by members of the Overseas Telecommunications Veterans Association.

13 Extract from 'J.M. Johnson's Private Autobiography', held by Kevin Kenneally.

14 Durrant, op. cit., p. 23, citing *Commonwealth Gazette*, 30 December 1911.

15 ibid., p. 23, no source cited.

wireless station were to and from ships and other wireless stations while those handled by the telegraph office went across the landline to other telegraph offices. If the landline failed, the wireless station handled urgent traffic for the telegraph office and, when the telegraph office was closed, the wireless station could utilise its telephone link to send out urgent telegrams. The two facilities, although quite separate entities, thus supported one another in times of need.[16]

At the outset of World War I, there were fears that, because the coastal wireless operators monitored transmissions from enemy ships, raids might be made on Broome and Wyndham. These fears subsided when the German warship Emden, which had just destroyed the E.E.T. Company's station on the Cocos Islands, was put out of action by HMAS Sydney in November 1914. Steps were then taken to place the coastal wireless network under the control of the Navy. The operators had naval rank and wore uniform and, at the two Kimberley stations, they intercepted Dutch wireless traffic so that 'the question of neutrality' could be monitored.[17]

The PMG resumed control of the coastal wireless network in 1920.[18] Less than two years later, the Commonwealth Government signed an agreement under which it retained a 51% controlling interest in the network and Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Limited (known as AWA) progressively took control of the stations.[19] Much haggling over valuations accompanied the transfer of the two-building stations, and the documents for Broome station were not signed until 17 April 1929. The long delay came at a bad time because, after nothing had come of a 1916 proposal to build quarters for the Broome staff, a 1921 decision to purchase four houses was allowed 'to stand over' while the transfer to AWA was finalised.[20] The Broome staff had lived in hotels, boarding houses and other private accommodation since the station opened and they continued to do so for the duration of the AWA management.[21]

AWA continued to operate the coastal wireless network during World War II, with the operators acting under Army censorship rules and using Playfair code words understood by some other 800 operators, government officials, missionaries, plantation owners and airline pilots in the Coast Watching Organisation. Broome was one of six stations at which the officer in charge was appointed an honorary Air Intelligence Reporting Officer, and men from

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16 National Archives of Australia (Vic), MP341/1, 1916/755, Wireless . Broome; and information provided by members of the Overseas Telecommunications Veterans Association.

17 Heritage and Conservation Professionals, 'Broome Bowling Club (Former Wireless Station): Conservation Plan', pp. 15-17; and Tom Ronan, *Packhorse and Pearling Boat: Memories of a Mis-spent Youth*, Cassell Australia, Melbourne, 1964, p. 40. It is noted that a more detailed coverage of wartime events is available, with a full lists of sources, in the Conservation Plan.

18 National Archives of Australia (Vic), MP341/1, 1920/11541, Radio Telegraph service – staff – Report of committee.

19 D. J. Amos, The Commonwealth Stories: The Story of the Commonwealth Fleet of Steamers [and] The Story of the Commonwealth Wireless Service, n.p., n.d., pp. 37-8.

20 Mitchell Library, ML MSS. K61961, Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd, Box 1391, Document 2; and National Archives of Australia (Vic), MP341/1, 1922/1230, Wireless Station. Broome Staff accommodation.

21 The failure to provide staff accommodation is discussed in 'Broome Bowling Club (Former Wireless Station): Conservation Plan', pp. 14-15 and 18-21. Subsequent personal contact with one of the last AWA (Broome) operators has confirmed that AWA did not build or purchase staff quarters.

the station joined the Broome Guard ready to defend the town against the enemy.[22]

The Air Board required the Broome and Darwin stations 'to maintain a continuous loudspeaker watch on 6540 kc/s' when the local Department of Civil Aviation Aeradio Stations were closed. This activity proved critical, firstly, after Japan entered the war in December 1941 and took Rabaul late in January 1942, and secondly, after the War Cabinet ordered the evacuation of all non-essential Europeans from Australia's north-west in February. This evacuation coincided with the evacuation of refugees and wounded troops from the Dutch East Indies, resulting in up to 57 aircraft a day passing southward through Broome, the first refuelling point on Australian soil. The workload at Broome was such that the wireless station staff needed two extra radiotelegraphists to handle the air traffic communications. Air raids had to be endured too and, although the Japanese did not bomb Broome, the War Damage Commission paid for the repair of minor damage said to have been sustained when a shell exploded near the station.[23]

During the war years, the Commonwealth Government took part in negotiations that resulted in a 1945 agreement to restructure Commonwealth communications by arranging, firstly, for all submarine cables and radio stations to pass into public ownership, and secondly, for each country to take control of its overseas telecommunications through the agency of a public utility corporation. In Australia, this objective was achieved through the creation of the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (Australia) in August 1946. OTC was 'to operate and develop Australia's overseas public telecommunications services', acquiring AWA's radiocommunications assets in the process. Transfer of these assets and associated staff took place under an interim management agreement on 1 October 1946, and OTC assumed full control on 1 February 1947.[24]

At the time of the takeover, the coastal radio stations provided 'world-wide high-frequency radiotelegraph services with ships' and 'radiotelephone services with small ships'. They also maintained a continuous listening service for distress calls and, by arrangement with the Commonwealth Health Department, provided a free medical service to ships without medical officers. Several stations including Broome were responsible for outpost stations which, having come into being through Darwin Radio in 1935, had continued throughout World War II as part of the Outpost Radio Service. This service handled emergency communications and spoken telegrams for remote pastoral properties and missions, supplementing the communication facilities afforded by the Royal Flying Doctor Service network. It was not an official OTC function but the Commission 'had no option but to keep it going until Telecom was able to take it over' in the mid-1970s.[25]

While the Outpost Radio Service may have created more work for the OTC staff at Broome, they fared better than their predecessors had under the PMG

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22 ibid., pp. 25-6.

23 ibid. See for more detail and sources.

24 Durrant, op. cit., pp. 166–7; and Edgar Harcourt, *Taming the Tyrant: The first one hundred years of Australia's international communication services*., Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 249.

25 Durrant, op. cit., pp. 174, 178–9 and 196–7.

and AWA in that the OTC provided staff houses in streets adjacent to the station.[26] The OTC continued to operate from the original Broome premises until 1967 when a new station was built north of the town—at a cost of $238,000—because urban development, and electrical installations in particular, were causing 'increasing interference to the safety-at-sea radio service'. The new premises have since closed.[27]

Given its long association with communications, Broome Bowling Club is still often referred to as either the 'Wireless Station' or the 'OTC Building'. It was vacant until 1973 when it was vested, minus part of its original land, in the Shire of Broome. In July 1980 it was taken over by the newly formed Broome Bowling Club which recognised the historical significance of the building and, despite the likelihood of incurring additional costs, restored it as nearly as possible to its original condition. It is not known when an interior wall in the transmission house building was removed to create the area now used as the lounge and bar. [28]

Since 1981, only minor alterations have been undertaken to the interior of the place.[29] Broome Bowling Club was classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) on 7 June 1983.[30]

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Broome Bowling Club is located on a corner site in a now predominantly residential area of the Town of Broome. Photographic evidence indicates the surrounding area was previously sparsely developed.[31]

The two attached buildings that form *Broome Bowling Club* are joined by a valley gutter, and a breezeway common to Broome vernacular architecture separates the two under the roof join. A wide verandah was provided around both buildings, and this has been extended further on the west side to provide additional covered area for the current usage. With the modification of the buildings for the Bowling Club use, the interiors of both the former transmitting house (south) and power house (north) have been altered to suit the new use.

The external form *Broome Bowling Club* could be described as of a Federation Bungalow style[32], although this would simply classify the place by time (Federation c.1890 - c.1915) and external shape (Bungalow - a single storey building with commodious verandahs). While the building was constructed

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26 National Archives of Australia (WA), K1201/1, WAC4563/4, Broome - 3 Residences - Drainage and Water Supply, and WC5259, Broome - OTC - Lots 185 & 225 - Water Supply and Sanitation, and WE5800, Broome - OTC Cottages - Electrical Installation, and WC6977, Broome - OTC Residence - Mary Street - Septic Tank.

27 National Archives of Australia (WA), K273/44, 1963/32, Broome – OTC – Radio Station, pp. [1–4], 87, 92, 93 and 116; OTC (Australia), 'Broome Radio VIO talks to ships of all nations'; West Australian, 8 December 1967, p. 39; and Conversation by Tanya Suba with Reg Jones, 26 June 1997.

28 Heritage and Conservation Professionals, 'Broome Bowling Club (Former Wireless Station): Conservation Plan', pp. 30-3 and 44.

29 Conversation between Tanya Suba and Mrs C. Scobie on 26 June 1997.

30 National Trust Assessment Exposition, 7 June 1983.

31 Heritage Council of W.A., PD 0298, Place File photographs dated circa 1925.

32 Apperly, et. al, op. cit., pp.144 -147.

for a technical rather than residential purpose, the style of *Broome Bowling Club* is coincidentally suitable to climate responsive architecture of the Kimberley Region. This Radio Telegraph Station design of the standard buildings was also used at Esperance and elsewhere.

The floors of *Broome Bowling Club* are constructed of concrete, the walls of large size concrete block (300 mm thick & 500 mm long) which have been cement rendered and marked to resemble stone coursing. The roof is timber framed and clad with corrugated iron roof sheeting. Verandah posts are steel tube, and the timber verandah beams have been clad with fibre cement sheeting protective fascia where exposed on the east elevation. Metal security screens have been placed over window openings.

Mature palm trees provide protection from the climate to the east and north (street) elevations, with the west elevation (to the bowling greens) covered by extended awning coverings placed to provide further solar protection without hindering views of the playing surfaces.

The entry to the bowling club is located off Herbert Street to the east, and is through the breezeway between the two attached buildings. In the southern half of the overall structure, the member's bar occupies two thirds of the floor area enclosed by the major walls, a store and a coolroom the other third. Enclosed storage area, another coolroom, the Captain's Office, and an external bar (1993) are located in former verandah areas. The BBQ area for the Club has been constructed to the south of this half of the Bowling Club building.

Broome Bowling Club appears to be well-maintained. The underside of the roof sheeting displays significant rust areas to the west end of the breezeway, and it is possible that the sheeting has been painted externally to cover deterioration. The bases of the walls have been painted with a dark coloured plinth, and it is possible that this paint has been placed to cover previous rising damp deterioration. The pergola and other ephemera structures are in poorer condition, with the pergola having suffered the damaging effects of termites.

13. 3 REFERENCES

Amos, D. J., *The Commonwealth Stories Volume 2: The Story of the Commonwealth Fleet of Steamers [and] The Story of the Commonwealth Wireless Service*, n.p., n.d., [the latter story was first published in 1936].

Durrant, L. *The Seawatchers: The Story of Australia's Coast Radio Service* North Ryde, NSW, Angus & Robertson, 1986.

Harcourt, E. *Taming the Tyrant: the first 100 years of Australia's International Telecommunications Services* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Moyal, A. *Clear Across Australia: A History of Telecommunications* Melbourne, Nelson, 1984.

National Trust Assessment Exposition 07/06/1983.

OTC (Australia), 'Broome Radio VIO talks to ships of all nations', *Contact: Pearling Port*, third issue, 1978.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH
