



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

London Court is an unusually thorough application of the Inter-War Old English style of architecture to a retail shopping arcade. (Criterion 1.2)

London Court terminates the northern vista of Sherwood Court and is a distinctive landmark in both St. George's Terrace and Hay Street. (Criterion 1.3)

London Court contributes to the streetscape of St. George's Terrace and of Hay Street with its richly detailed facade and distinctive clocks. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

London Court has a close association with the recovery of the Western Australian economy from the Great Depression. (Criterion 2.1)

London Court is historically associated with the development of the shopping precinct of Hay Street, and the construction of shopping arcades as a medium for north-south pedestrian movement through the city. (Criterion 2.2)

London Court is closely associated with the entrepreneur and miner, Claude de Bernales. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

London Court has social value as a place for the people of Perth to shop and for the association of the place with Britain and British history. (Criterion 4.1)

London Court contributes to the sense of identity and the community's sense of place. Images of the place are constantly used on postcards and promotional tourism material for Western Australia. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

London Court is uncommon, in Western Australia, in its thorough application of the Inter-War Old English style of architecture for a shopping arcade. (Criterion 5.1)

London Court is a rare example of an open air city arcade. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

London Court is representative of the Inter-War Old English style of architecture, embodying all the principle elements of the style. (Criterion 6.1)

London Court is representative of a period in Western Australian history when social and cultural links to Britain were commonly accepted as the norm throughout the community. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

London Court is in very good condition. There is a regular programme of maintenance and upkeep which, although not guided by a conservation plan, is sympathetic to the retention of the cultural heritage significance of the place.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

London Court has a high degree of authenticity. The original purpose of the place - that of a retail, office and accommodation arcade - has been retained, although the residential function has diminished over the years. The current programme of maintenance will maintain the integrity of the form and function of the place.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

London Court has a high degree of authenticity. Most of the original fabric of the place is insitu and repairs and replacements, as a result of commercial use, have for the most part been sympathetic. The current programme of reinstatement of the fabric of the place, in a style replicating the original, does not diminish the authenticity of the place and can be easily identified.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

London Court is a two storey shopping arcade and office complex, connecting St. George's Terrace and Hay Street. It is built in the Inter-War Old English style.¹

London Court was erected on land purchased, in February 1936, on the site of a collection of back alleys known as 'Gun Alley'.² The land was purchased from T. G. A. Molloy, by Claude A. de Bernales for the Australian Machinery and Investment Co. Ltd, for a sum of £75,000.

The idea of an arcade to provide a thoroughfare between St. George's Terrace and Hay Street, was conceived by de Bernales as an important link between Perth Railway Station in Wellington Street and the Esplanade.³ *London Court* would, via Sherwood Place to the south and through the new *Plaza Arcade* to the north, provide a direct north-south connection for pedestrian traffic through the city.⁴

de Bernales established London Arcades Ltd. to manage the project and commissioned Bernard Evans of Melbourne to design the arcade in association with local consulting firms Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown, Architects, and Mr C. Steel, Engineer.⁵

Work commenced on *London Court*, in August 1936, and construction was completed in 1937. The cost of the arcade was £100,000 and it comprised fifty three shops, fifty five offices and twenty-four residential flats.⁶

London Court was designed in an imitation 'Tudor' style with huge wrought iron gates at each entrance and half timbered walling to the arcade. The walls featured ornamentations of hand carvings, gargoyles, masks, shields, crests and wrought iron signs and brackets. The gabled roofs, weather cocks and lead lighting also contributed to the creation of a Tudor style. Terracotta tiles were laid in a crazy effect on the floor of the arcade to suggest ancient cobble stones.

A special feature of both the St. George's Terrace and Hay Street frontage were the clocks which dominated the entrances. Above the St. George's Terrace entrance was 'St. George slaying the dragon'. The dial was a reproduction of La Gross Horloge of Rouen. Above the Hay Street entrance, the dial of the clock was a replica of the face of Big Ben in St. Stephen's Tower of the House of Parliament, in London.⁷ Both clocks were animated and figures moved in and out to celebrate the chiming of the quarter, half and full

¹ Apperly, 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) pp. 202-205.

² Ward, K. *Perth Sketchbook*, (Rigby Ltd. 1979) p. 30.

³ *W. A. Mining and Commercial Review*, Vol. 2, no. 6. August 1937, p. 184.

⁴ *Building and Construction* 30 July 1937, p. 3.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.8. *West Australian* 30 September 1937, p. 12;

⁶ *ibid*; *West Australian*, Saturday 1 August 1987, p. 46.

⁷ *Building and Construction*, pp. 3-4.

hour. The clocks were made by the Synachrome Company of London at a cost of £4,000 and were the only material in *London Court* which was not locally produced.⁸

At the ends of the arcade, facing the interior space, are statues of Dick Whittington and his cat (northern end) and of Sir Walter Raleigh (south end) in bastion towers.

London Court was opened, on the 29 July 1937, by the Lieutenant Governor, Sir James Mitchell, in the presence of the Premier, J. C. Willcock and the Minister for Mines and Health, S. W. Munsie and other notables.⁹ That the place was an important affirmation of British culture was confirmed in the opening where, Lieutenant-Governor James Mitchell said that '[we] Australians pride ourselves on being intensely British'.¹⁰ In his opening speech he commented that *London Court* was 'unique in Australia' and that it 'would be an ornament to the city'.¹¹

During the ceremony, Mitchell unveiled two plaques, one commemorating the ceremony, and the other giving a brief history of the building. After an inspection of the arcade, the official party and ninety guests assembled at a luncheon held in the basement restaurant of the Arcade. This restaurant resembled an old English tavern with huge wooden pillars and adzed roof supports.¹²

In his toast at the luncheon, Munsie described *London Court*, as a 'romantic oasis' from the 'artificial bonds of our lives' In many of the speeches, *London Court* was depicted as a place of escape from the modern world to a more romantic and simpler past; as a respite to a time when 'man was happier' and where, despite 'social evils and plagues', there was 'real valour, deep passions and wondering thought'.¹³ It was claimed that the shopping arcade would be an 'oasis in the desert of our materialism.'¹⁴

The opening of *London Court* was celebrated with a three day 'Ye Olde English Fayre' which was held in conjunction with the official opening which raised £2,000 for the Perth Hospital.¹⁵ The *West Australian* reported that the event attracted thousands of visitors who were treated to the sight of volunteers and helpers dressed in Elizabethan style costumes. The 'fayre' was followed by evening dramatic programmes and musical items, including excerpts from Twelfth Night, madrigals and folk songs.¹⁶

Apperly and Irving describe *London Court* as 'a richly detailed Tudor pastiche proclaiming the prosperity that followed the Great Depression'.¹⁷ The imagery espoused by buildings such as *London Court* hearkened back to a time of adventure and prominence in English history. As Apperly and Irving

8 W. A. *Mining and Commercial Review* p, 186.

9 *ibid*; p. 187. List of official guests

10 *ibid*; pp. 184-5

11 *West Australian*, 30 July 1937, p. 5.

12 W.A. *Mining and Construction* pp. 186-187.

13 *ibid*; p. 188.

14 *ibid*;

15 *West Australian* 30 July 1937, p. 5.

16 *ibid*.

17 *ibid*.

note: 'In a society still having predominantly Anglo-Saxon origins, great virtue was seen in the image of an idealised English traditional cultural centred vaguely around the time of King Henry VIII'.¹⁸ *London Court* was a '..piece of the Old Home land' in Western Australia as well as reflecting the enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit of de Bernales.¹⁹

Despite the Tudor style, *London Court* was a thoroughly modern building for its time:

Although no effort or expense has been spared in the endeavour to reproduce a replica of an old English street, the new structure has been built of steel and concrete and its shops, offices, residential flats, and other facilities are ultra modern in every aspect and combine the very latest aids to comfort and convenience. Every care has been taken to provide thoroughly modern appointments and equipment. A special post office is provided, and every possible facility and attention will be given. A laundry and dry cleaning depot and parcels receiving depot is also provided for the convenience of tenants. The offices are situated at various points on the first, second, and third floors, and at both ends in Hay-street and St. George's Terrace blocks. Being well situated in the centre of the business life of the city, they offer the advantage of easy access to all parts of the town. They are modern in design and layout in practical way so that they can be taken as one, two, three or more rooms, and if desired the whole floor taken. They all have large windows looking on to the Court or the street and giving full light and air throughout, and are serviced by conveniently situated staircases and electric elevators.

Attractive residential flats form an important part of the new arcade. These are twenty-four in number and contain every convenience necessary for self-contained living premises. They comprise well proportioned living room, bedrooms, kitchenette and bathroom and have a front entrance staircase with landing in the Court, and a back staircase for delivery of domestic requirements; the same rear staircase leads to a convenient and modern wash laundry and drying area, situated on the roof.

The living rooms are fitted out with a special air-conditioning service not previously installed in this State, which will create a cool atmosphere in summer and warmth and comfort in winter.

The bedrooms are maintained in the same wall texture and proportionate with the living rooms, and are fitted with diamond square lead lights in keeping with the old period style.

The bathrooms are a model of attractiveness and practical comfort, green or yellow in colour, tiled to half the height of the room, with modern square baths, wash basins, modern fittings in chromium, a permanent hot and cold plunge and shower bath and glass shower screens to protect the walls and floors.

The kitchenettes are all that can be desired for convenience and up-to-dateness. Walls, surroundings and sinks are finished in Vitrolite, and each kitchenette is fitted with a modern gas stove, a refrigerator and built-in cupboards, with most attractive and convenient sinks, and hot and cold water.

The electrical equipment and lighting apparatus are also neat and conveniently placed, and provision has been made for the installation of telephone, radio and other electrical appliances.

¹⁸ Apperly, p. 202.

¹⁹ W.A. *Mining and Construction* p. 185.

The elaborate garbage collecting system is handled daily from the different flats by the hygienic staff, the garbage being removed daily to the central depot from which it will be carted off the premises.

Another particularly convenient feature is the fact that the residential flats can also be used as service flats whenever desired by arrangement with the Court basement restaurant.²⁰

The construction of *London Court* was a key part of an intensive building program which signalled that the building industry in Perth had recovered from the economic depression in the first half of the 1930s. The *West Australian*, reporting on the growth, noted that:

The greatly increased expenditure in the building industry has been of widespread benefit. Not only has it provided employment to practically all the tradesmen in that industry, but it has given much work to all other sections of the community. Building concerns are showing confidence and many are either expanding their premises or erecting new buildings, while private residences are being built at the rate of from 130 to 150 a month.²¹

Other buildings constructed in Perth at this time include *Emu Brewery* (1936), *Lawson Flats* (1937), *Piccadilly Arcade and Theatre* (1938), *Gledden Building* (1935-38), *Royal WA Institute for the Blind* (1937), *King Edward Memorial Hospital* (1939), *Criterion Hotel* (1937), and the *Como Theatre* (1938).

Circa 1952, *London Court* was sold by de Bernales to London Court Pty. Ltd., the current owners.

In 1995, *London Court* is still in use as a shopping arcade and office block; although, the only current residential function is that of the caretaker. The restaurant is now used by a health club.

London Court is popular as a shopping arcade and is an important tourist site, and is depicted on promotional materials and postcards of Perth. The clocks, with their animated figures marking the changing of the hour, are still an attraction for tourists and families alike.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

London Court comprises a basement, ground and three floors at each end, while the central spine of the arcade is two storeys in height and open air in the centre, creating the effect of a narrow street.

London Court originally had fifty-three shops, fifty-five offices and twenty-four flats. *London Court* is still substantially as described at its opening. Minor changes have been made over the years. Some the offices and shops have been combined and all of the four-roomed flats, other than the caretakers quarters, have been converted into storage areas and office spaces for the shops.

Other changes have included the replacement of the 'cobble stones' by aggregate concrete slabs; the replacement of the plants in the window boxes with artificial ones to reduce water damage; and, the progressive relocation of the intrusive air conditioners to the rear walls of the arcade.

²⁰ *Building and Construction*, pp. 3-8.

²¹ *West Australian* 30 September 1937, p. 12.

In the 1950s, a number of changes were made to shop fronts, most notably the shop on the eastern side of the arcade at the Hay Street entrance which was given a modern flush window front with stainless steel surrounds. Recent maintenance has endeavoured to reverse unsympathetic alterations, including the reinstatement of the original copper framed windows in the shop facing Hay Street on the western side.²²

The interior of *London Court* has changed little, although some paint finishes have been altered. The interior apartments feature large tudor style fireplaces with electric fires insitu. The bathrooms and kitchens are still original, although they are in the process of being modernised to confirm with current health requirements. The rooftop still features the original laundries and hanging lines for the drying of clothes.

The stairs are terrazzo finished to the first floor level on the west and to the second floor on the east. In the tower blocks at each end the terrazzo finish extends to all the floors. There is a lift at the northern (Hay Street) tower which has original timber panelling with 'tudor' embellishments, a coved timber ceiling and a 'clock hand' elevator indicator at each floor.

There has been an ongoing programme of maintenance of the place with most repairs since 1978/79 being in sympathy with, or seeking to restore, the original fabric and finishes of the place.

13. 3 REFERENCES
