Not Just Pretty Buildings!
Diversity and Representation in WA’s Register of Heritage Places
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State Heritage Office

• Established under the Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990
• State Heritage Office carries out the Heritage Council’s day-to-day operations, projects and service delivery
• Conservation of places with cultural heritage significance to Western Australia

Our three core functions are to:
• Establish and maintain the State Register of Heritage Places
• Ensure development is sensitive to cultural heritage values
• Promote awareness and knowledge of Western Australia’s cultural heritage.
A problem with the way the State Register is perceived is that it’s ‘just pretty buildings in Perth and Freo.’

This image is a visual representation of the number of places on the State Register across each WA region. The Metro area takes the lion’s share, however there are registered places in every region of the state. Within the Metro area (divided by LGA), there is again a spread of places throughout the map, however again the majority of places have been registered in Perth and Fremantle.

So while there is a good spread of registered places spatially across the state, there is a focus on Perth and Freo.
To investigate this a little further, this slide shows the State Register divided by decade (top). This graph shows one period as standing out from the rest, and this can be highlighted better when the Register is divided by historic period (bottom). The Gold Boom/Federation Period of 1890-1914 takes in the majority of registered places. It does therefore appear, at least at face value, that there is some truth to ‘pretty buildings in Perth and Fremantle.

Why is this the case? The reason is that the Gold Boom was a social and economic turning point in the history of the state, with the new resource discoveries sparking a building boom in the state’s two economic centres, Perth and Fremantle. These lavish, architect-designed buildings represented the spirit of the period, and have been preserved for their contribution to the landscape ever since. There is also the fact that very early colonial places have not all survived to be registered, and very late (postwar) places are often not considered for state registration.

However, it is argued that the State Register is more than just ‘pretty buildings’! This basic time/space analysis hides a variety of different stories on the State Register.
Image shows the relative proportions of uses as represented on the State Register. It can be seen that there is a wide variety of site type that are captured on the Register, rather than simply a focus on residential/commercial.
A small number of examples of places on the Register showing different cultural groups that are represented. Aboriginal, Asian, Italian, Greek, Eastern European to name a few. Of particular interest are the northern townsites of Broome and Cossack, which were the meeting points for Asian, British, Aboriginal and Afghan cultures.
There are two other statutory lists that the State Register works in conjunction with. The first is the Register of Aboriginal Sites, maintained by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* (1972). The second is the Maritime Archaeology Database, maintained by the WA Museum’s maritime Archaeology Department under both the *Maritime Archaeology Act* (1973) and the *Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act* (1976). Each of these departments is staffed with specialists with experience in dealing with the unique challenges of Aboriginal or Maritime Archaeology. Each list also holds a statutory role in protecting the heritage of their respective areas.

The message here is that while the State Register is a wide-reaching list, we don’t need to replicate other binding lists where other departments already have specialised staff, resources, contacts and legal authority to deal with them.
The following slides are a number of places or groups that the State Heritage Office are currently assessing, that show the diversity of areas, time periods, uses and cultural groups on the State Register.

Hunt’s Wells Group is a collection of 25 wells stretched between Cunderdin and Kalgoorlie, which mark Hunt’s attempt to create a pastoral track into the interior of the state for expanding agricultural settlement. Hunt’s team consisted of convicts, settlers and Aboriginal guides (including Tommy Windich), who over the course of several years established ‘Hunt’s Track.’ The track did not promote any new settlement and was considered a failure in its time, however in the 1890s the track was essential to the movement of prospectors into the interior, and was a vital part of the route to the Goldfields in the early years of the Gold Boom.

Notably, many of the wells established by Hunt were modified Aboriginal water sources, with various Aboriginal groups, communicating with, assisting or even resisting Hunt’s project.
Another focus of the State Heritage office’s Assessment Program has been the development of modern architecture in Perth. In the Post-War period, the architectural world was rocked by the wide-spread use of ‘International’ style buildings, which avoided the ornamentation and materials of traditional buildings and instead created sleek, open structures that were designed to respond to the local environment.

(Note that Thrimby House is not one of the places that has been selected to progress, but is a good demonstration of the architectural advancements that are trying to be demonstrated on the Register).
The *Lime Kilns, Wanneroo* group tell the story of Greek, Italian and Eastern European migrants who lived in the Wanneroo area in the 1930s to 1950s, working and sometimes living out in the bush where natural limestone formations came to the surface. These migrant groups built basic lime kilns, which they repaired, expanded and developed over the years, to create a network of lime burning companies that rivalled the established lime industries operating out of the metro area. The basic lime kilns construction and remnants of simple shacks tell of the hardships that were overcome by these families, which are still significant parts of community histories today.
Little Wilgie Ochre Mine, Cue is a unique site in the state’s interior that exhibits both an Aboriginal mine site and a non-Aboriginal mine site, both layers of occupation targeting the rich ochre deposits trapped within the rocky outcrop. Culturally, the site is part of the larger Wilgie Mia complex, an industrial ochre site that was mined by the Wajarri Aboriginal people for thousands of years before British arrival. Little Wilgie in particular was an ‘open’ site, available to be accessed by women and uninitiated men. The impact of post-colonial treatment on Aboriginal culture is one of the stories that can be demonstrated by this fascinating place.
Bundi Club is a place that is already on the State Register of Heritage Places at an Interim level, and is part of a program to progress long-standing Interim registrations through to Permanent status.

The place was established c.1912 as the Meekatharra Court House and Mining Registrar’s Office, however after the building was closed in 1963 it was re-opened as an Aboriginal community support centre known as the Bundi Club. Instrumental in this redevelopment was Avy Curley, an Aboriginal woman and rights activist who worked for decades to improve Aboriginal conditions in the state’s north.

The current register entry, written in 1992, does not take the Aboriginal history of the place into account, and so the State Heritage Office is working with local Aboriginal groups to re-write the assessment documentation to better demonstrate the history of Aboriginal self-determination and the significance of Avy Curley.
The Red Herring!

An architect designed Gold Boom building in Perth, so on the surface would be ‘just another pretty building.’ However, this place is on the Assessment Program for its links to an Brothel Madame Josie DeBray, who was part of Perth’s infamous Roe Street red light district, which operated from c.1915 to 1958. Accusations were levelled at Josie DeBray by the newspapers of the day that the house was involved with prostitution, a clam which has yet to be proven but is considered possible.

This place demonstrates that the State Register is abut demonstrating the development of Western Australia’s history and identity, which include the ‘negative’ aspects of society. Prostitution, while not generally explored in tradition histories, is something that nonetheless has shaped Western Australian history.

Therefore it can be shown that even a ‘pretty building’ can still have an unexpected history and demonstrate a range of different stories on the State Register!
Conclusions

- State Register of Heritage Places covers a wider variety of stories, uses and structure types
- Continually improved and expanded by the Assessment Program

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Thank you

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