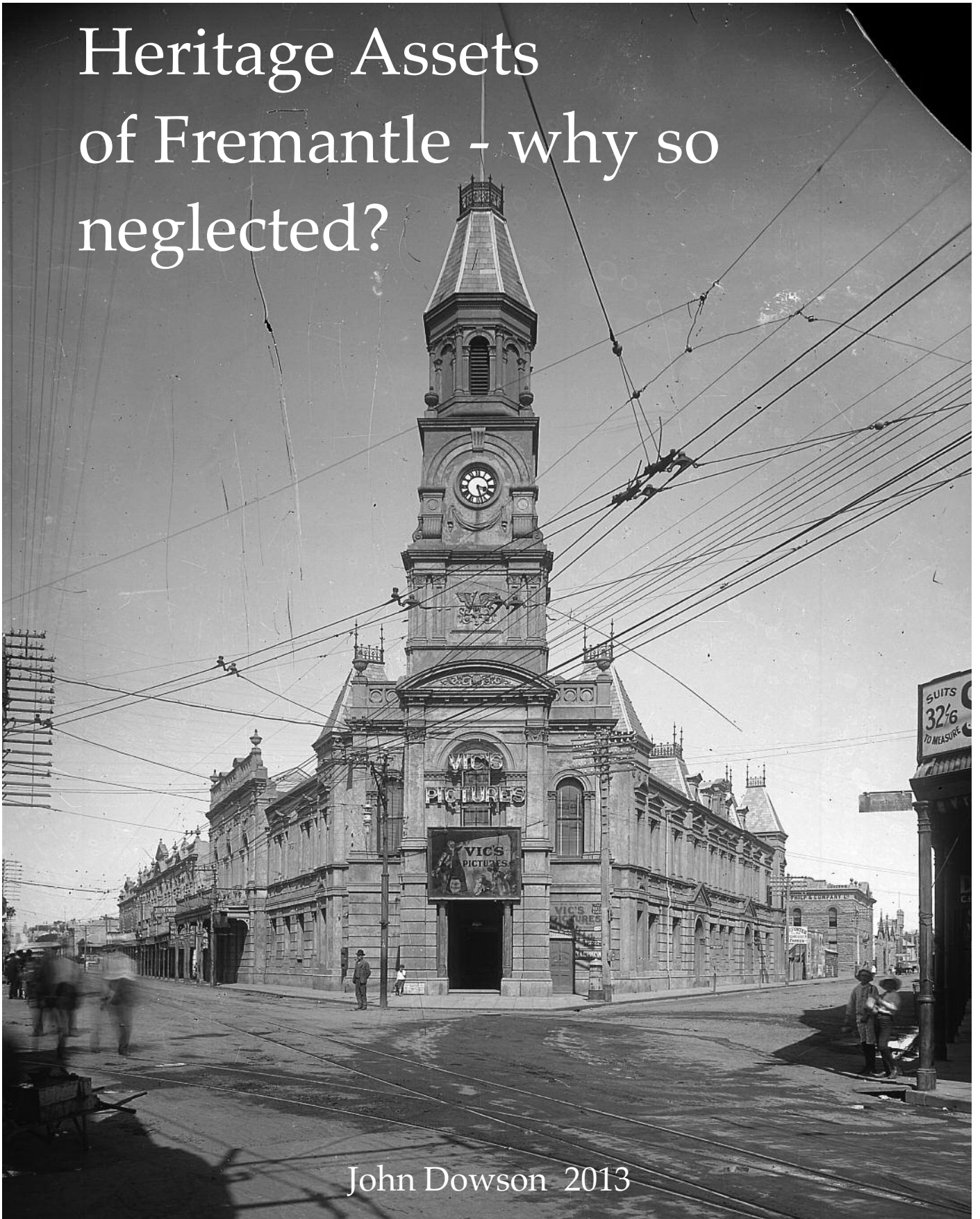


Heritage Assets of Fremantle - why so neglected?



John Dowson 2013

Fremantle is blessed with valuable heritage assets.

Few WA towns have Fremantle's built environment wealth.

A key unique economic attractor- the heritage of Fremantle- has languished as Fremantle Council pursues its own version of 'revitalisation'.

Revitalisation should focus on enhancing key valuable existing assets. In terms of cultural, social, and economic value, the heritage assets of Fremantle are worth a great deal. But, the heritage assets owned or controlled by Fremantle Council deteriorate year after year, despite promises from council.

This report looks at some of the heritage assets owned or controlled by Fremantle Council.

Compiled by John Dowson, author of four books on Fremantle, for FICRA (Fremantle Inner City Residents' Association). FICRA hopes that decision makers will pressure Fremantle Council to get on and look after its heritage assets. Repeated promises are no substitute for real action.

In 2009, Fremantle got a new mayor and a new plan to 'revitalise' the town. A great deal of time and money has been spent on consultants, and on a business plan to sell \$30 million worth of council assets to a private developer Sirona in return for major new buildings in the centre of town.

And, the town planning scheme was altered, despite objections from the majority of residents, to allow developers on some sites to have buildings 7 metres higher than the detested 10 storey Johnston Court flats built back in the 1960s.

As we wait for the revitalisation, which should focus more on better use of the assets we have, Fremantle's heritage has not fared well. Council's heritage committee has been disbanded, the West End Listing committee has met just once this year, and only a strong backlash prevented Fremantle Council from getting rid of Heritage Week and amalgamating it into the Fremantle Festival.

Heritage Assets of Fremantle

Council's neglect of its properties

A discussion paper from FICRA (Fremantle Inner City Residents' Association) July, 2013

The heritage assets owned by Fremantle Council, or under its control, are key economic, social, and cultural assets attracting residents, visitors, and tourists. In many cases, they are among the largest and most important attractors in the city.

Regular programmed appropriate maintenance and full restoration of these assets, along with appropriate use, is essential to Fremantle's prosperity. It also sets an example for the rest of the community to follow.

Despite good work over recent decades by council in saving heritage and promoting it, it appears that currently the valuable assets in Fremantle Council's hands are being poorly managed. There is a serious backlog of works needed and in some cases, evidence of poor quality work being carried out.

Council Owned Heritage Assets include:

Fremantle Town Hall
Fremantle Markets
Victoria Pavilion
Victoria Hall

Council managed assets include:

Arthur Head
Cantonment Hill
Esplanade Reserve
Fremantle Arts Centre
Pioneer Park
Princess May Park



Fremantle Town Hall



The two images may look much the same, but there are significant differences. Fremantle Town Hall in 2013 (above left) has had no money spent on it inside since the America's Cup in 1987. The outside has flaking and severely deteriorated paintwork with no external painting since 1993. The top flagpole is now so damaged the Australian flag can no longer be flown from it each day. Missing is the balcony on the left of the building. Council paid an architect \$10,000 to provide drawings to replace the verandah, but then placed the much detested statue of John Curtin where the verandah was to be built. Also missing is the ridge cresting on the turret roofs. \$2 million was promised in the 2012 budget, but no works have yet been carried out.

Works needed for Town Hall: Complete 1986 restoration works that were never finished that would further reveal significant interior details, plus the roof, the clock, the clock tower, interior and exterior repairs and painting.

When the newly appointed Governor of Western Australia, Dr Ken Michael, stepped through the doors of the Fremantle Town Hall in 2006 to a reception inside, he remarked how wonderful it was that the West End was World Heritage Listed.

This error is commonly made. Unfortunately, not only is the West End not World Heritage listed, it is not even heritage listed by the WA Heritage Council. And, if the current council has its way, the West End boundaries will be redrawn to exclude the Fremantle Town Hall altogether from the precinct.

The last time internal maintenance occurred at Fremantle's key civic building was during the America's Cup in 1987. Extensive internal restoration was done, but not completed. The last time external painting was done in 1993. As a result, the city's iconic 1887 centrepiece is degraded and tatty, now needing millions of dollars to repair and repaint it.



Fremantle - unrevitalised



Fremantle Markets

Icon of Fremantle built at the same time as the nearby Victoria Pavilion. Following the awarding of a long lease to the Murdoch family in 2006, council was left with the responsibility for \$4 million worth of restoration. Council paid for a Conservation Plan in 2008, and then spent \$240,000 on working drawings to begin a program to restore the markets after many years of neglect.

Years later, little has been done and the works appear to have ground to a halt.

The first works were begun, but soon collapsed (right).



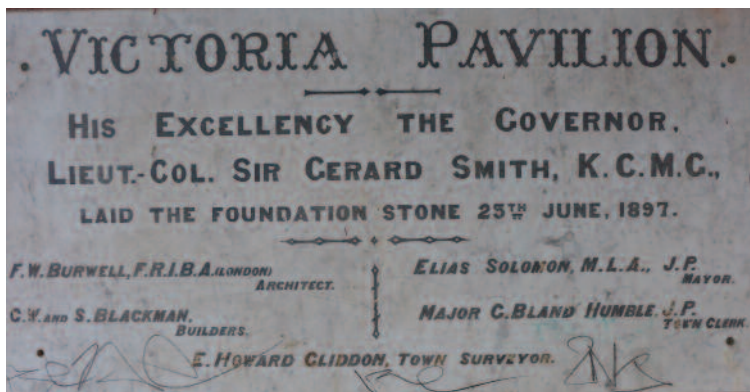
Works needed for Markets include:

- a) restoration of the shopfronts.
- b) restoration of the roof (and clerestory windows) and storm water disposal.
- c) restoration of masonry and internal services.

Right: Recent works to the Fremantle Markets have lasted barely a year.

Below: 2011 opening of new works at Markets.





Victoria Pavilion

Home of the Bulldogs! 19th century pavilions are getting rarer as more are redeveloped. This 1,200 seat survivor has seen soldiers drilling, cricket, cycling, hockey, croquet, trotting, Australian Rules and rugby league. Initially home to the Fremantle Football Club, it hosted both South Fremantle and East Fremantle clubs until East Fremantle moved out in 1903.

The CEO of South Fremantle Football Club, Stuart Kemp, wrote to FICRA in July 2013: "Fremantle council are doing absolutely nothing for the upkeep of Heritage buildings. The Victoria Pavilion would not have had any work done on it for 15-20 years." He wrote:

- "The stand is an Occupational Health & Safety nightmare waiting to happen.
- Many of the wood panels are frail & brittle and the seats and steps are deteriorating.
- The exit points to the grandstand are old and dilapidated.
- There is no fire proofing of the stand.
- The Facia of the Stand is terrible.
- The toilets & amenities are third world.
- The floors under the carpets are wood and in a number of places are rotten.
- There is no fire proof insulation above the roofs and all that lies between the roof & the stand is a gap.
- There is a distinct feel & smell of dampness, mould and un-cleanliness due to the lack of up keep of the building.
- The sewerage went a few months ago and we often have smell of rotten sewage.
- We have on occasions seen large rats in the place."



Above: A shocking lack of maintenance by Fremantle Council is evident.

Below: The Parry Street face of Victoria Pavilion.



Works needed for Victoria Pavilion: full restoration, including removal of the bitumen rise on the oval side, to make the ground floor accessible from the upgraded space, and the restoration of the facade and internal spaces facing Parry Street.

Victoria Hall



Goldrush 1896-1897 architecture of John Talbot Hobbs. Built as the parish hall for the nearby St John's Church and a community asset ever since.

This magnificent hall at 179 High Street has been saved several times, by the Fremantle Society in 1974, by Mick Vodanovich and Peter Nettleton in 1996, and a few years later by two Fremantle advocates against a council proposal to allow the hall to be turned into a furniture shop with apartments built at the rear. Cr Johnston then took up the challenge, and council bought the hall.

Extensive restoration works have been carried out by Murray Slavin architect.

However, the building at the moment is little used, a fate shared by the nearby town hall.

Works needed for Victoria Hall: The second stage of Victoria Hall works including the secondary hall, air-conditioning, and heritage interpretation. Like too many buildings, there is no Masterplan to guide future works.

Arthur Head

Arthur Head is the State's most significant historic site for all Western Australians being the first settlement site of the Swan River Colony. It is also, therefore, an area of national importance.

- City of Fremantle The Arthur Head Project 1983

But, recently Fremantle Council embarked on a project to turn Arthur Head into an Arts Hub which has angered all tenants there, and neglected the place's history. This, on top of recent projects in the area which have either been poorly done, or not completed - West End of High Street Project and the Whaling Project. The most recent, the Old Port Project, is yet to be completed.



Arthur Head "Arts Hub" Fiasco

Edited version of opinion piece by John Dowson originally published in the *Fremantle Herald*:

City Ward Councillor Tim Grey-Smith is rarely seen in action or in print, but recently he wrote a *Thinking Allowed* about plans to 'shake up Arthur Head and turn it into a dedicated arts hub.' The article contains a photo of Cr Grey-Smith with the mayor and Cr Pemberton on Arthur Head, funnily enough in almost the exact spot that Captain Charles Fremantle placed the British flag in 1829 to claim this part of Australia for the British. While Charles Fremantle was doing something truly momentous, the three in the photo were plotting something quite the opposite.

Nowhere in any of Cr Grey-Smith's rhetoric is there reference to the fact that Arthur Head and the Round House are of huge historical significance to the State. This important area is being used simply as a backdrop for council's poorly thought out 'cultural strategy'. In the process, Council has caused deep distress to everyone currently involved with or working at Arthur Head. Proven standout artists already there, who are key attractors to Fremantle and that area, have been so shabbily treated they had to ask State Government MP Simon O'Brien to come to Fremantle to help them.

Fremantle already has an arts hub- it's called the Fremantle Arts Centre, and it costs the ratepayers well over \$1 million in wages each year to run.

Arthur Head is first and foremost an important historical area. If Council wants to 'revitalise' the area, then proceed to enhance its history. Focus on that first. Get on and fully implement Council's own strategy for the area (Arthur Head Reserve Strategy Plan). Commemorate our pioneers. Rebuild the state's first courthouse where it used to be alongside the Round House in 1835. But, whatever happens, the area needs great sensitivity and care.

We have no commemoration for our founding father Captain Charles Fremantle anywhere, let alone at Arthur Head where he planted the flag. Premier Colin Barnett indicated he may put \$100,000 towards an arts installation about Captain Fremantle, but the mayor's response was to tell me to 'get the Premier to write to me.'

Council's previous heritage architect Agnieszka Kiera, who worked on plans for Arthur Head for 25 years, states (July 2013): "The Roundhouse and Pilots cottages were supposed to be progressively and fully restored and adopted for residential and other complementary uses. There is a full conservation plan for the whole Arthur Head Area, which should be implemented long term - not some ad hoc arts precinct, but the appropriate and relevant conservation as the settlement site and its heritage interpretation - such as for example an archaeological display of the original power station."

Cantonment Hill

Following lobbying by the community (especially the Cantonment Hill Residents Action Group formed in 1997), local politicians, and council, Cantonment Hill was sold by the federal government to Fremantle Council for \$76,000 in 2010.

Despite being in council hands for several years, and despite \$2 million promised in the 2012 budget, the site sits neglected and boarded up. Neither a draft masterplan or final masterplan is available on the council's website.

Melissa Parke, the Federal Member for Fremantle, said in Parliament in December, 2008: "The City of Fremantle intends to restore the land for public use, in particular to maintain Tuckfield Oval, rehabilitate the signal station for the purpose of making it into an interpretation centre and public lookout, create a safe public park and regenerate the native bushland."

That was 5 years ago.



Esplanade Reserve

A \$60,000 Masterplan for the Esplanade Reserve passed by Council in 2009 has been ignored. Key projects to enhance and protect the grass and trees have not been carried out. Now, four years later, with no public consultation about the location, and contrary to the Masterplan which rejected a skate board facility in that location, council will proceed with a \$1.6 million project that keeps growing and growing in size. In the four options considered below in September 2012, the sizes ranged from 1,000 to 1,900 square metres. That grew to 3,500 by the June 2013 Council meeting, and to 4,100 in July.

Below: Four modestly sized options considered by council for a skate plaza. All, except the one on the car park, are contrary to the Masterplan. The community were never allowed to comment on the final chosen location in the park, which has grown from the 2012 plans below of around 1,100 square metres, to the current 4,100 square metres. A letter written by FICRA to the council about the Masterplan months ago still has not been answered. *Bottom:* The park is described in council's own documents as an 'oasis' and a 'green lung' of the city, but the 2009 Masterplan has not been implemented, and the park's value as a green space has been disregarded.



Princess May Park

Subject to a 1989 Council Policy DGF20 and a 1995 Conservation Plan, Princess May Park has been poorly maintained by Fremantle Council over the decades. In 2004 a concept plan for upgrading the open spaces of Princess May Park was passed by Council. It included damaging proposals such as the removal of a section of the heritage wall, and focussed on superficial additions of public art instead of addressing major problems like soil levels which were damaging the buildings, and the plan was put aside. However, proposed restoration works to coincide with the 150th anniversary in 2004 of the former boys' school (now FTI, the Film and Television Institute) were never funded, and nine years later the urgency and high cost of the situation is outlined in the news article below (*Fremantle Herald* 13/7/13).

Meanwhile, the Princess May School building, also part of Princess May Park and leased to the Fremantle Education Centre, obtained \$1.5 million in grants through their own efforts to repair their building.



Above: Inappropriate airconditioners and rising and falling damp scar the highly significant 1854 boys' school.

Magical and rare 1854 Fremantle Boys' School in Princess May Park desperately needs \$3 million of works.

FTI repair blows out

by BRENDAN FOSTER

THE Fremantle council-controlled Film and Television Institute building on Princess May Park needs \$3 million in repairs.

A planned \$600,000 repair to the heritage-listed building's leaky roof unearthed bigger problems, with the roofing contractor telling the council it could do nothing unless the masonry, electrics and superstructure were fixed.

National Trust boss Tom Perrigo says he's not surprised by the blow-out, as he believes the council has neglected the building for the last 20 years.

"It is one of the most cherished heritage buildings in WA but they have run it into the ground.

"We tried five years ago to invest money into but [former Fremantle mayor] Mr Tagliaferri

stopped it. The council wanted to take on the whole Princess May precinct which is a huge responsibility."

Mr Perrigo reckons the the council has been diverting the rent from nearby Clancy's pub into general revenue rather than ploughing it back into the area.

Management order

But Fremantle mayor Brad Pettitt shot back that the council had waited four years for a management order giving it official control of the site. It arrived a couple of months ago.

"Understandably we weren't willing to invest major ratepayer funds until we were sure the City of Fremantle would be the ongoing management authority," Dr Pettitt said.

"The City of Fremantle nevertheless has been spending money on up keeping the FTI over the past few years whilst

we have also been putting together a proper integrated plan for a major restoration for the building which we plan to do over the next year or two."

Mr Perrigo says while he's pleased the council isn't looking for a handout from the state government to do the repairs, he says their city-wide obligations, including the warders' cottages, markets, arts centre and Round House are starting to mount up.

"All those projects could cost between \$20million to \$30 million, so where is Fremantle getting the money to pay for it?," he questioned.

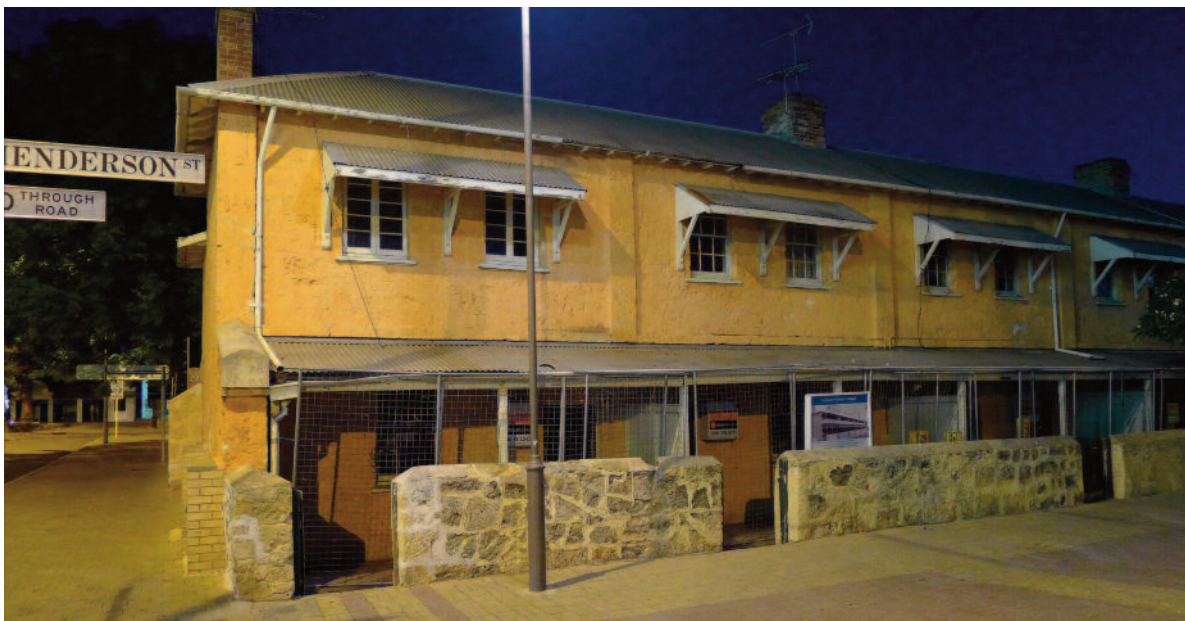
Dr Pettitt said the council had increased its building maintenance budget by \$2.5 million over the last five years and he was proud of the work it had done building the city's heritage stock "up to scratch".

FTI is housed in the former Fremantle Boys School, which was built in 1855.

Solutions?

- a) Appreciate that Fremantle already has great economic attractors like its heritage.
- b) Urgently get on with basic maintenance. Ensure council has works engineering staff who understand and appreciate heritage.
- c) Use the conservation plans and masterplans already in existence and implement them. Don't always accept the cheapest tenderer - get the best.

In the 1970s Fremantle Council had a building surveyor who was a builder. He had a building crew including plasterers, painters, and handymen. Today there appears to be no system, no pride, and no basic maintenance for heritage properties. And, major restoration projects have stalled. Repeated promises are made at budget time that don't get carried out. No major heritage works were done in 2012-2013 despite the backlog shown in this document.



The fifteen Henderson Street warders' cottages, the oldest terrace housing in Western Australia, lie abandoned and derelict due to neglect by the Department of Housing. Fremantle Council, which cannot manage its own assets, wants to get the cottages on a peppercorn 50 year lease. But, the cottages urgently need \$6 million now, not in several years' time.

All photography, except front cover, by John Dowson.
Written for FICRA by John Dowson, July 2013