

'Artillery Barracks', Fremantle

'Artillery Barracks' is situated on a 3.87 hectare site centred around Cantonment Hill, a 33 metre high natural feature which dominates Fremantle Harbour and the estuary of the Swan River. From the earliest days of the Colony of Western Australia, the military significance of the feature for the defence of the Perth settlement was recognised. It was selected as the site for a coastal artillery garrison and acquired the name 'cantonment' which means 'military quarters'.

Construction of the barracks began in June 1910 at a time when the Commonwealth Government was initially investigating Cockburn Sound (now the anchorage for HMAS *Stirling*) for the establishment of a naval base. The first stage of construction, completed by June 1911, included an orderly room and guard room, two-storey barracks for forty men with detached kitchen and bath blocks, quartermaster's store and gymnasium. The materials used externally were brick and local Cottesloe stone with tiled roofs and the completed cost was £12,848.

The second stage, which was completed by December 1913, included a further barracks block, a hospital, a residence for the commanding officer, quarters for two officers and a warrant officer, and a block of quarters for three married non-commissioned officers. The same building materials were used in this stage. Artillery Barracks occupies some 3.87 hectares.

The Artillery Barracks complex is on the Register of the National Estate and the National Trust's Register of Classified Places. The Barracks constitute one of the few complete groups of historical buildings in Western Australia where the buildings involved were constructed in a relatively short period - three years - resulting in a very fine grouping of carefully related buildings, constructed in similar styles and materials.

'Gun House'

'Gun House' was built during the second stage of construction as married quarters for the major commanding the coast artillery garrison, which occupied Artillery Barracks from June 1911 onwards. The house was used as a major's quarters until World War II, when it was used as accommodation for single officers.

During the war, successive General Officers Commanding the Army's Western Command lived in rented accommodation in Perth despite several unsuccessful overtures to Army Headquarters to purchase a permanent residence. Immediately following the war, residential accommodation in Perth was extremely scarce so, in May 1946, the incoming GOC, Major General J.S. Whitelaw, reported to Army Headquarters that he had been ... 'absolutely unable to find a suitable residence'. As a last resort and temporary measure he occupied the major's quarters in the Artillery Barracks.

Throughout Whitelaw's five years as GOC Western Command, he made several attempts to purchase a GOC's res-

idence but without success. Subsequent GOCs continued to press for the purchase of a suitable residence with similar results. In January 1952, the Command Secretary wrote to Army Headquarters that, ... 'during the almost 40 years I have been at this Command Headquarters, I do know that the want for an official residence has been the cause of very much concern, worry and unhappiness to many GOC'. He went on to describe Fremantle as ... 'a locality in every way quite unsuitable for a GOC's residence'.

In 1955, the then GOC, Major General J.G.H. Dyke, in correspondence to Army Headquarters described Gun House as 'most unsuitable and ... located in a very poor class locality of Fremantle'. Notwithstanding determined efforts over many years to relocate the GOC from Gun House, it never eventuated. Between 1946 and 1995, all of 18 Army regional commanders to have served in that time lived in Gun House; six major generals and 12 brigadiers.

By the 1980s, Fremantle had lost its 'dockside' reputation. A report to Army Office at the end of 1986 described Gun House as being located in an 'acceptable socio-economic environment'. Fremantle had become gentrified!

Over the years a number of minor alterations were made to the house in an effort to make it more appropriate for a GOC. These alterations included the addition of various small external verandahs, minor internal alterations, periodic modernisation of the kitchen and bathrooms, as well as replacement of electricity, gas and hot water systems. In the early 1980s, extensive landscaping occurred in the house grounds, but otherwise Gun House in 1993 looked almost identical to when it was built 80 years earlier.

In 1994, the Defence Housing Authority undertook major extensions and renovations to Gun House. The extensions were designed to achieve harmony with the original work and great care was taken to preserve the style and proportions of the building and to match original bricks, tiles, plaster and fittings. At the same time, a number of earlier alterations were removed to restore the 1913 house to its original appearance. The result of the extensions is a charming, spacious and well



appointed federation style residence set in attractive grounds with pleasant, uninterrupted views over the Swan River. The gardens are ideal for outdoor entertainment.

At the front entrance to 'Gun House' in the Artillery Barracks at Fremantle, the visitor is met, appropriately by an 1813 ship's cannon. It is unclear when the name, 'Gun House', was adopted, but it certainly dates back to the late 1940s, if not earlier.

'Rifle Cottage'

'Rifle Cottage', at 62 Tuckfield Street, is situated next door to Gun House and was originally designed to house two officers and their families. Both buildings were of similar design. All rooms in the house were contained within the main building except the "man's room", which had access from the rear verandah. The two bedrooms, two sitting rooms, dining room and kitchen had fire places and a wash house was provided at the rear of the residence.

During World War II the cottage housed single officers but, in the early 1950s, the layout of the building was changed internally to provide a single residence. The name, 'Rifle Cottage', is known to have carried on from the 1970s. It is said to have been dubbed as such by the residents to distinguish its diminutive status from the neighbouring Gun House.

'The Gunners' Cottages'

The Warrant Officer's quarter on the corner of Burt Street and Queen Victoria Street, Fremantle, was constructed along with a block of three terrace homes for married NCOs on Queen Victoria Street in 1913. Over the years, it is known to have served as home to 35 regimental sergeant majors consecutively which must be some record!

A further two blocks of three terrace homes were constructed at a later date in matching materials and style. On completion, there were three lots of three terraced units on 97 - 113 Queen Victoria Street known as 'The Gunners' Cottages'.

Apart from the work done on Gun House, the Defence Housing Authority has maintained the other quarters to a comfortable standard but with limited improvements pending a decision by the Department of Defence as to the future of the Artillery Barracks complex. The homes continue to be popular with tenants as they are close to the centre of Fremantle.



The Gunner's Cottages were home to the soldiers who manned the guns at Fremantle and their families. Each of the cottages offered two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, larder, bathroom and separate wash house.

Life in 'The Gunners' Cottages'

Mrs Angela Bishop, the wife of Lance Corporal David Bishop, current residents of 103 Queen Victoria Street, kindly gave her impressions of life in the 'The Gunners' Cottages'. She said that her best source of information had been from an unexpected visit from a previous resident, Mr Bill Hayden, who was born in one of these residences in 1919 when his father was stationed in the garrison having moved into No. 113 with his family in early 1919.

Mr Hayden remembered that the interior of the house was predominantly jarrah timber - floors, door surrounds, steps, french doors, skirting boards, mantelpieces, verandah. Now the floors have been carpeted, mantelpieces and other interior timber painted over many times. Mrs Bishop said that they were delighted to have the carpet removed in the lounge and rediscover the lovely old jarrah floors with six inch boards.

Mrs Bishop said, 'the architectural style is, I suppose, typical of the time with 11 ft ceilings, picture rails, long narrow windows over six foot high, and nine inch skirting boards. There are french doors with windows over them from the dining and lounge rooms which were present when Mr Hayden lived in the neighbourhood. The exterior consists of a sturdy double red brick construction with a decorative single layer of larger limestone blocks'.

'The laundry and toilet were separate and outside (as Mr Hayden reminded me that families of the day lived by the philosophy of "sit inside, s..t outside"). The copper in the laundry provided the hot water supply for washing and bathing. Mr Hayden can remember his mother tripping backwards and forwards with buckets of hot water, tipping them into the bath through the window. Then in strict order the whole family would bathe in the same water.'

'The exterior yard of the house has changed much from the time when Mr Hayden lived there. The front yards used to run at a 45 degree angle down to Queen Victoria Street, where they were bordered by a low white picket fence. Now we have large limestone retaining walls and many steps. The backyard too was steep leading up to the back laneway with wooden steps. Now the yards are fenced and terraced with concrete steps'.

'Queen Victoria Street in this area has also changed much since Mr Hayden's time, with none of the railway, buses or trams which used to pass by the house en route to the city. The nearby Bridge Hotel, also gone, was a favourite with the men of the garrison'.

'Mr Hayden and family lived at No. 113 until the late 1930s and had many fond memories of their time there. He recalls the occasions when the garrison fired its coast guns which would make the houses shake and the tiles rattle and send a shower of dirt, dust and soot on anyone inside'.