

# Warders' Cottages Fremantle

*the shameful neglect of Western Australia's oldest terrace housing*



## Report to Premier Colin Barnett

by

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to: The Premier of Western Australia Hon. Colin Barnett MLA

Dear Colin,

FICRA (Fremantle Inner City Residents' Association) has been concerned for a long time about the future of the highly significant convict built cottages in Henderson Street.

We hope you will be able to step in and provide leadership on this issue as the cottages lie empty and in danger of further deterioration or arson. FICRA member John Dowson, former Deputy Mayor of Fremantle and former President of the Fremantle Society, has written this report. This matter is urgent and we are grateful you have offered to visit the site. The CEO of the National Trust Tom Perrigo would be delighted to arrange the visit (9321 6088).

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Numbers 31-41 Henderson Street. The second group of Warders' cottages to be built, looking south from outside the police station. Built in a standard Royal Engineer Georgian style using limestone from the prison site nearby. The housing is based on designs for worker housing then current in England. At this time (1851), terrace housing was almost unknown in Western Australia because there was no need for the small population to save land with that form of housing. However, the rapid build up of convicts and guards from 1850 for the Convict Establishment meant crowded living. These small cottages housed two families, one on the ground floor and one upstairs

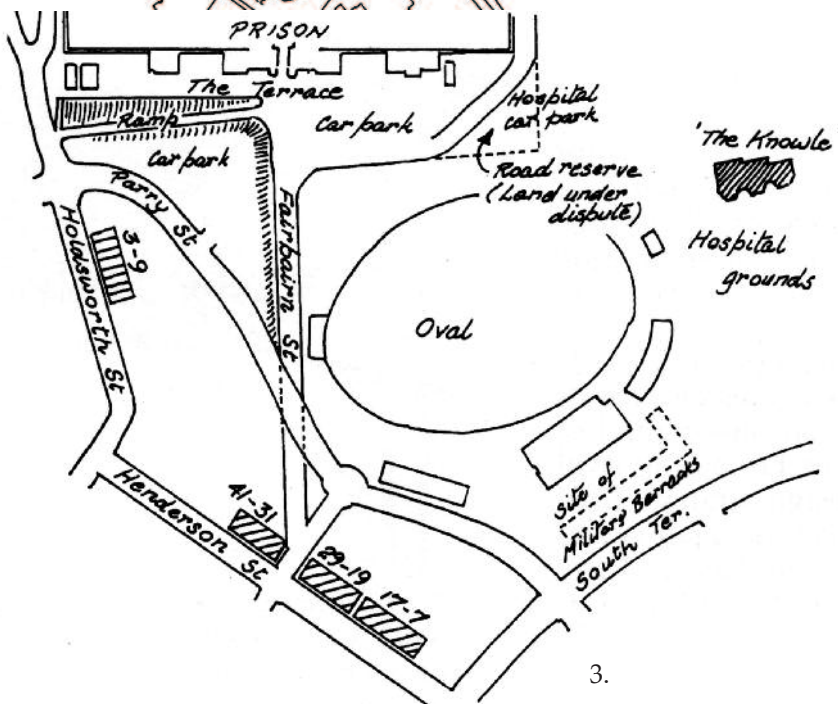
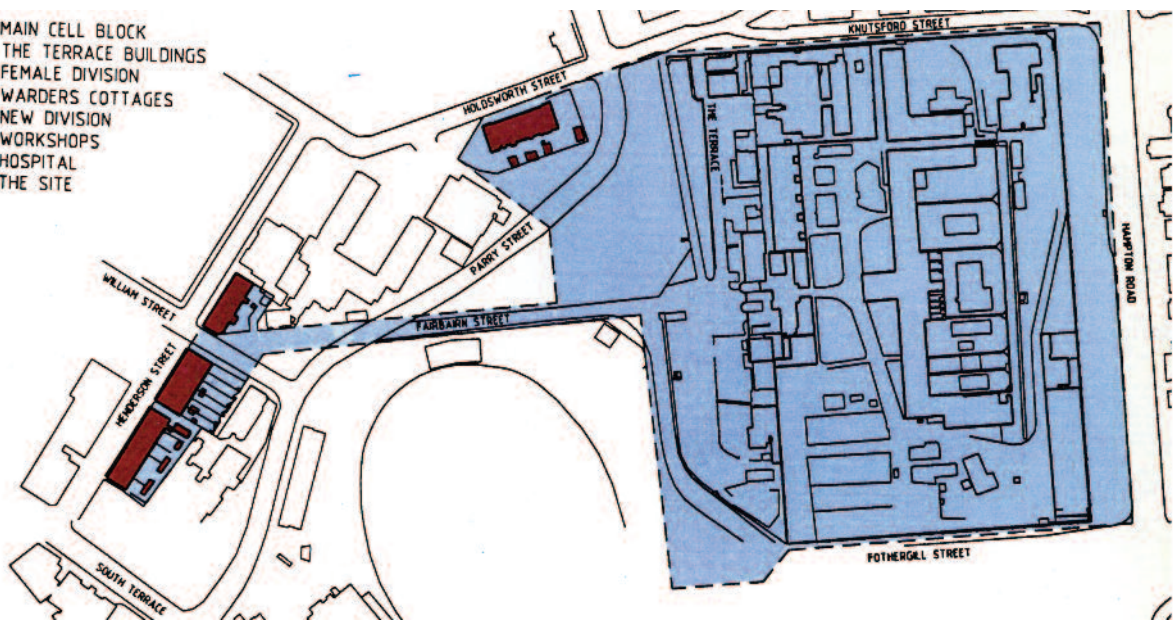
The housing was provided for the warders on the basis that it was close enough to the prison for warders to get home for lunch, and close enough for the authorities to ensure they responded quickly to any alarm bell rung at the prison.

# Warders' Cottages Fremantle

**Significance:** The former Warders' Cottages (actually terrace housing), in Henderson Street Fremantle, were included in the National Heritage List in 2005 along with Fremantle Prison. In 2010 the prison was put on the World Heritage list, the first and only built environment in Western Australia to receive that honour. The Warders' Cottages are included in the 'buffer zone' of the World Heritage listing and are the earliest examples of terrace housing in WA. The cottages are of exceptional significance given their age and relationship to the prison.

**Early History:** The three blocks of terrace houses fronting Henderson Street were the first buildings erected by the Convict Establishment to house guards and warders who arrived from 1850. The *Scindian* was the first ship to arrive with convicts and by 1851 when the first of the cottages were completed, 977 convicts and 186 pensioner guards with 127 wives and 256 children had arrived. Housing for the guards was so urgent that Captain Henderson built them before getting approval from London. They were subsequently approved on the basis of being 'no frills' dwellings.

- 1 MAIN CELL BLOCK
- 2 THE TERRACE BUILDINGS
- 3 FEMALE DIVISION
- 4 WARDERS COTTAGES
- 5 NEW DIVISION
- 6 WORKSHOPS
- 7 HOSPITAL
- 8 THE SITE



Above: Plan of Fremantle Prison showing the Warders' Cottages in Henderson Street at the end of the Fairbairn Street ramp. The ramp links the prison to the city and the cottages are the city face of the prison. The later built Holdsworth Street warders' cottages are not part of this report as they are not being disposed of by the Department of Housing.

Left: The western setting of the prison showing the Warders' Cottages along Henderson and Holdsworth Streets as pictured in James Kerr's Conservation Plan 1998.

Originally part of the Convict Establishment, they are now alienated. Built of local limestone, 19-29 Henderson Street (6) were built first in 1851, then 31-41 Henderson Street (3), with 7-17 (6) completed in 1858.

# Recent History of the Warders' Cottages

In 1991 the WA Labor Government sold the warders' cottages, which had always been part of the prison, to the Department of Housing for \$2.1 million. They were operated as Homeswest accommodation between 1991 and 2011. They were completely vacated in October 2011.

The cottages are currently in a poor state due to the lack of maintenance by the Department of Housing.

Much planned maintenance never occurred:

In 2005 a Schedule of Conservation and Maintenance Works (external) totalling \$611,650 was not done.

In 2007 a drainage proposal was not carried out.

In 2008 urgent conservation works were not completed.

In 2009 external works worth \$1,946,000 were never done.

**The convict built buildings lie empty, needing urgent major works, and threatened by vandalism and arson.**

*Below: Two blocks of warders' cottages frame the view to the Prison. Right: Deteriorating history.*







## Current Condition

*Top:* Upper rear of 19-29 Henderson Street.

*Middle:* Backyards.

*Left:* Upper floor showing wide original floorboards.

*Right:* William Street exterior of 29 Henderson Street.



the way forward....



# 2012-2013 National Trust Due Diligence Study

Following discussions with the Department of Housing, The National Trust began preparation of a “Due Diligence Report,” for the three warders’ buildings on Henderson Street.

## **Scope of Study:**

- a) costed scope of work for the complete internal and external conservation of the three terraces being considered.
- b) to advise on future use in relation to Building Code of Australia compliance.
- c) to provide estimates for ongoing maintenance costs.

## **Cost of Works:**

The report was finished in January 2013. The report estimates necessary works and covers external and internal conservation work recommendations, archaeological recommendations, and landscape and drainage issues.

Internal and external works are estimated to cost **\$6 million**. These costs are current estimates for works carried out in total **at this time**, not spread out over several years.

## **Use of Buildings:**

Given its association with the World Heritage listed prison, the National Trust believes: “**future ownership and management of the cottages should be directly associated with the Fremantle Prison**” and agrees with the 2011 Kelsall Binet Conservation Plan: “**The preferred use for these buildings is that they continue as residential accommodation**” (Policy 10).

**The report points out that some forms of accommodation like low cost housing or long term housing would result in significant changes to conform with BCA regulations, irreversibly damaging these highly important 160 year old buildings.**

22/12/12

by CARMELO AMALFI

THE National Trust has called on the Barnett government to surrender the deteriorating Henderson Street cottages that the WA housing department has neglected for 20 years.

The Trust wants the abandoned warders' residences fixed and returned to the World Heritage-listed Fremantle prison to form part of a historic precinct that includes the old police station.

Trust chief Tom Perrigo said the prison taking over the soon-to-be-vacated cop shop would open the way for new educational facilities and a possible new home for the Fremantle Society, which is living on borrowed time at its Roundhouse cottage.

The Trust is negotiating with the department to restore the 22 Henderson Street cottages and boost the supply of housing under the government's affordable housing strategy.

On Wednesday, the Trust asked the department to comment on a draft due-diligence report which recommends returning the cottages to the prison after restoring them for an estimated \$6—\$8 million.

The department purchased the cottages from the prison in 1992 for \$2m.

Last year, the department evicted tenants and has fenced the properties off. Parts of the structurally-sound but run-down buildings contain asbestos.

The terraces—the first of which were built in 1851 for warders with families and which housed prison staff until the closure of the prison in 1991—were initially offered to WA not-for-profit company Access Housing to provide low-income accommodation.

On a tour of the site, Mr Perrigo said the cottages could provide "transitional housing" if transferred to the Trust, council or prison and leased to a housing provider such as Sydney-based not-for-profit company Community Housing.

"We all want to see them used, but not for permanent housing," he said. "They must remain in public ownership."

Curious about the type of tenants who might inhabit the refurbished cottages,



## WA Housing fails Freo heritage test

Hilton ward councillor Bill Massie mused, "are we talking released prisoners?"

Mr Perrigo replied, "more like people who need short-term accommodation for a year or two, for example people who are moving to another Homeswest property".

Asked whether students would fit the bill, Fremantle Liberal candidate Matthew Hanssen light-heartedly quipped: "Students don't have the right to live in Fremantle. I lived in East Fremantle and had to travel to UWA to study."

The rest of the tour group did not reply. Heritage advocate John Dowson agreed the cottages should remain in public hands, adding there was potential for world heritage funding to kick in for repairs if the cottages are returned to the prison.

Describing the state of the cottages as a "shocking indictment on the department" given it had collected rent for 20 years, Mr Dowson said he preferred a mix of

business space and accommodation for police, firefighters or nurses to ensure a return over a 20-year lease.

Mayor Brad Pettitt said the council was meeting regularly with the department, which is soon expected to relocate to Fremantle, to see how the cottages could be best used.

"It is our view that low-cost or transition housing probably isn't the best use for such important and unique heritage buildings so we are investigating better long-term uses where the heritage can properly be protected," he told the *Herald*.

"We are keen for something to happen as quickly as possible as they are causing a range of problems in their current state.

"I know there are rumours about the backyards (referring to claims the Markets owners want to extend into the properties). Council has no plans to excise these."

*The Fremantle Herald* on 22 December 2012 summed up the issues.

## Bibliography

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City of Fremantle *Urban Integration Strategy* 1991

Fremantle Prison website

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Palassis Architects *Fremantle Prison Heritage Precinct Masterplan* 2002

Urbanizma *Fremantle Prison Buffer Zone* 2007

*all photographs taken by John Dowson*



Rear sheds of warders' cottages

# Plan of Action

1. Adopt recommendations of Due Diligence Report.
2. Department of Housing and /or State Government to fully fund restoration works following 20 years ownership by Department of Housing.
3. Buildings and all associated land such as rear gardens to be given back to the prison or to a suitable body such as the National Trust or Fremantle Council.
4. Buildings to be retained in government ownership.
5. Buildings to be rented to the public for short term specialist heritage accommodation with some possible commercial element related to Fremantle Prison.

*“The whole Establishment will in time be the most important and interesting feature of the City”*

*Richard Gray, Senior Planner William Holford & Partners 1974*



March 2013: Trumpeting the neglected but important warders' cottages. Please support FICRA in its efforts to save these 160 year old treasures.