

Place No. 63 Union Bank, Roebourne



Union Bank building, Roebourne 2012

LOCATION	
Name of Place	Union Bank (fmr), Roebourne
Other Name (1)	Shire of Roebourne Offices (fmr)
Other Name (2)	Shire of Roebourne Library (fmr)
Location/Address	
Street Number	46
Street Name	Roe Street
Suburb/Town	Roebourne
Other Locational descriptor (text)	515240 mE, 7702786 mN (MGA94 Zone 50) Longitude: 117.1464 Latitude: -20.7746

OWNERSHIP & LAND DESCRIPTION				
Owner	Address	Phone/fax	Status	Item No.
Shire of Roebourne	PO Box 219, Karratha			
Reserve No.	Lot/Location No.	Plan/Diagram	Vol/Folio	Item No.
	5 & 7	P528	1024/426	

LISTING AND ASSESSMENT	
HCWA Reference Number	2335
State Register of Heritage Places:(Y/N)	No
Classified by the National Trust (Y/N)	Yes
Register of the National Estate (Y/N)	Yes
Local Town Planning Scheme (Y/N)	Yes
Management Category	A

DESCRIPTION	
Construction Date (1)	August 1888
Construction Date (2)	
Site Type (Place Type)	Individual Building or Group
Use(s) of Place	
<i>Original</i>	COMMERCIAL: Bank
<i>Present</i>	EDUCATIONAL: Library

<i>Other</i>	GOVERNMENTAL: Office or Administration Building
Construction Materials:	
<i>Walls</i>	9. STONE 904 Local Stone
<i>Roof</i>	6. METAL 606 Corrugated Iron
<i>Other</i>	3. CONCRETE 399 Other Concrete
Condition	Sound, but evidence of termite infestation
Integrity (how much of the original fabric is intact?):	Almost original
Physical Description	
<p>The former Union Bank building is a single storey masonry building with an impressive front portico in the Victorian Free Classical Style. It is made from local stone, random laid, with a gabled roof clad in corrugated iron. The corners are completed with cement quoins. Iron balustrades form a decorative feature on the facade. The interior walls are rendered and painted. The original layout configuration is almost intact, with alterations mainly to the ceilings. A strong room was included in the original construction and there is a safe in the strong room, which may be original. Living quarters were provided at the rear.</p>	
History	
<p>The former Union Bank building is located on Roebourne Suburban Lot 1, land that was granted to John Withnell in 1866, as one of the first land assignments in Roebourne.¹ The Union Bank purchased part of Lot 1 from John Withnell for £200 in 1883 as an empty block and ideal site on which to build a new building for the Bank, opposite the newly opened tramway.² The Union Bank had operated in Roebourne from 1882 (at another site) to support the growing pastoral, pearling and mining industries. The building was completed in August 1888 and ran its business from here until 1929, when the Roebourne branch of the Union Bank closed and all accounts were transferred to the Port Hedland branch.³</p> <p>Thomas Anketell was the first manager of the Union Bank in Roebourne, from July 1882. His salary was £500 a year plus £100 tropical allowance.⁴ Not long after arriving in Roebourne, on 10th October 1882, Anketell wrote a report to the Inspector and General Manager of the Union Bank in Melbourne describing the town and prospects for the Union Bank in the region noting that 'Roebourne certainly claims our attention as the place in which to open in the first instance.'⁵</p> <p>The Union Bank first opened for business on 12 December 1882, renting premises from David Simpson on Lot 117.⁶ In his first report, Anketell describes this building as a 'four-roomed wooden building, kitchen, and stable... situated in the Main Street of the Town, and is in every way a most desirable site.'⁷ It is interesting to note that in 1882, Sholl Street was considered the main street of Roebourne as it adjoined Cossack Road, and led to Cossack.⁸</p> <p>It was in this building that the bank manager Thomas Anketell and his bank clerk Henry Burrup were brutally murdered on 12th January 1885, in a tragic event that became known across the country as the Roebourne bank murders. The crime was unsolved; no motive found and nothing stolen from the bank. In memory of Henry Burrup, the Government Surveyor F.S. Brockman named the highest hill on Dampier Island Mount Burrup in August 1885. When Dampier Island was connected to the mainland by a causeway in the 1960s, it was renamed Burrup Peninsula.</p> <p>In 1885, approval was given to the Union Bank for a new building to be built on the site purchased in 1883. The architects were J.W. Wright and Paterson.⁹ It was not until late 1887 that construction for the building commenced and was completed in September 1888 at an overall cost of £4,100, including bank fittings, with living quarters at rear.¹⁰</p> <p>The Pilbara goldfield was proclaimed in 1888 and proved to be one of the richest alluvial fields in the State, with 'more nuggets of over 50 ounces being found on the Pilbara than on any other diggings</p>	

in Western Australia.¹¹ The Union Bank was one of only a few banks nationally that weathered the stormy years of the 1890s without closing its doors and this is perhaps in part because of the gold rushes and the ensuing economic boom in Western Australia in the 1890s.¹²

The Union Bank opened a branch in Port Hedland in October 1901, reflecting that town's growing importance as the major port of the North-West, eclipsing Cossack and later Point Samson. The Union Bank operated in Roebourne until 28 February 1929.¹³ By the 1920s, Roebourne was undergoing an economic downturn. The Union Bank closed the Roebourne branch to rationalize services with the onset of the Great Depression. Accounts were transferred to the Port Hedland branch, leaving Roebourne without a bank

In 1929, the building was sold to the Roebourne Road Board, which managed roads, public health and water supply and distribution. Road Boards were first established in Western Australia in 1871 with legislation creating municipalities and road boards that enabled the boards to levy rates for the cost of roads. The North District Roads Board, precursor to the Roebourne Road Board, which included the entire Nichol Bay district, was established from 1871. In 1887 the Roebourne Road Board was declared. A 1904 map of the town of Roebourne shows the Council Chambers marked on Lot 118 on Sholl St. It is likely that the Roebourne Road Board operated from this building from at least 1887, perhaps earlier when it was the North Districts Road Board from 1871. In 1910, the population growth of both Roebourne and Cossack had dwindled and the two towns petitioned the government to dissolve their separate municipalities and bring Cossack under the Roebourne Road Board.¹⁴

During the depression and World War Two road boards went into decline with reduced economic development and a focus on the war effort. Much infrastructure fell into disrepair during the war years.¹⁵ During the 1950s, Pilbara stations struggled to return to the level of profitability. This was followed by a severe depression in the wool and beef industry in the 1960s that devastated the Pilbara pastoral industry.¹⁶ In 1960, as pastoral stations declined, the iron ore export embargo was lifted which opened up the Pilbara for mining prospects.

The Roebourne Roads Board became the Shire of Roebourne in 1961.

By 1965, the company Hamersley Iron established port facilities at Dampier and the Tom Price to Dampier railway was completed in 1966, with town sites being established at Tom Price and Dampier. The development of an iron ore industry in the Pilbara had massive consequences – Roebourne however was not to undergo the growth that might have been expected. With the establishment of Karratha in 1968 as the major administrative centre for the iron ore industry, Roebourne was eclipsed as the town of Karratha developed. The Former Union Bank building continued to operate as the Shire of Roebourne office until 1975, when the Shire relocated to Karratha. In 1975 the building began use as the Shire library and an infant health clinic.

With Mabo in 1992 in which the High Court decided that the doctrine of terra nullius should not have been applied to Australia, native title rights were recognised. It was not until 2005 that the Ngarluma/Yindjibarndi Native Title claim was granted – the first native title determination in the Pilbara region. Prior to native title being determined the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd (NYFL) was formed in 2000 as the mechanism for the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi people to engage in an agreement with Woodside Energy Ltd and their North West Shelf Venture partners. Natural gas was discovered off the Burrup Peninsula in 1979, after 1963 when oil and gas exploration permits were granted by the Western Australian government. NYFL moved into the Former Union Bank building in Roebourne on 16 October 2001, and were in the building until 2010.¹⁷

In 2010, Toland Architects drew up a Conservation Plan for this building with funding from Lotterywest. Few recommendations of this Plan appear to have been adopted and in 2011 the Shire undertook renovations on the building for use as Shire offices. It is currently (2013) housing Aboriginal social welfare group, Ngarliyarndu Bindarri Aboriginal Corporation, as well as some Shire staff.

Archaeology

There is slight potential for archaeology to reveal insight into the use of the building over time, however much of the history should be well understood through documentary sources.

SIGNIFICANCE**Historic theme (s)**

1. DEMOGRAPHIC SETTLEMENT AND MOBILITY
107 Settlements
111 Depression and boom
3. OCCUPATIONS
308 Commercial services and industries
4. SOCIAL & CIVIC ACTIVITIES
401 Government and politics
404 Community services & utilities

Statement of Significance:

The former Union Bank building is historically significant as the first purpose built bank in the North west, servicing the Pilbara goldfields and the growing district. The building also reflects the local governance of Roebourne over a long period of time from 1931 to the present time, first as the Roebourne Roads Board and then as the Shire of Roebourne. The building has contributed to the community's sense of place through its use by the Roebourne Public Library and the Infant Health Clinic from 1975-2001. In addition, it has an association with one of the first major compensation deals for native title holders, in association with the North West Shelf Venture, prior to native title being determined, as the offices of the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd (NYFL). The building contributes to the aesthetic value of the Roebourne townscape, with an imposing style and scale which makes it a landmark within the town.

ASSOCIATIONS

Architect/Designer (1)

J.W. Wright and Paterson

Architect/Designer (2)

Other Associated Person(s)

Thomas Anketell
Henry Burrup**OTHER****References**

See endnotes.

Union Bank Building Conservation Plan, Toland Architectural Design Partners, June 2011, Shire of Roebourne

MHI 1996

Site assessed and Place Name Record created

MHI Review 2012

Entry updated



Union Bank building 1970s, courtesy National Trust of Australia (WA)

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- ¹ State Records Office of Western Australia, Item 458, Cons 5000, Register for Roebourne town lots 1-298 and suburban lots 1-15. John Withnell was assigned Roebourne Suburban Lot 1 on 11 December 1866.
- ² Memo ANZ Group Archives, 10 September 1987, held in Shire of Roebourne Local History Office.
- ³ Email Correspondence with Archivist, ANZ Archives, 4 November 2010
- ⁴ Memo ANZ Group Archives 10/9/1987
- ⁵ Thomas Anketell to the Inspector and General Manager, dated Roebourne, West Australia, 10 October 1882, ANZ Group Archives.
- ⁶ http://roebournebankmurders.com/map_roebourne.shtml, last accessed 19 November 2010
- ⁷ Thomas Anketell to the Inspector and General Manager, dated Roebourne, West Australia, 10 October 1882, ANZ Group Archives.
- ⁸ See Roebourne Townsite Plan, State Records Office, Item 381 Cons 3868 2. Lots 25-35, 259-297, 173-175. (3/2) Lots 245-247, 225-248, S2 to S5 and S16
- ⁹ Email Correspondence with Archivist, ANZ Archives, 4 November 2010
- ¹⁰ Email Correspondence with Archivist, ANZ Archives, 4 November 2010; Memo ANZ Group Archives 10 September 1987
- ¹¹ H.J. Riatti, *A history of the development of the NW of WA*, 1964?, p 39. Quoted from C.H. Counsel "Pioneering the Gold Trail in the Kimberley and North West" *Journal and Proceedings*, WA Historical Society, Vol 1, Pt 7, 1930, p 37.
- ¹² Union Bank of Australia, Notes on History, received from ANZ Group Archives, 4/11/2010.
- ¹³ Email Correspondence with Archivist, ANZ Archives, 4 November 2010
- ¹⁴ De la Rue, p 130.
- ¹⁵ Crowley, p 288
- ¹⁶ Crowley, p 232
- ¹⁷ Shire of Roebourne building lease records, accessed 29 November 2010.