



# AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AGENTS INSTITUTE JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE CUSTOMS AGENTS INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA



☐ PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY: SOME DILEMMAS INVOLVING  
NEGLIGENCE ☐ STRAINS BEGIN TO SHOW ON CELA ☐ MORE ON  
INNOCENT ERROR ☐ BUSINESS BRIEFING ☐ CONFERENCE PLANS



## Serving the Gateway to the West



*Customs House, corner of Phillimore and Cliff Streets, Fremantle, built in 1908.*

**F**REMANTLE Customs House, now located on the corner of Henry and Phillimore Streets, is the fifth in a line of Fremantle premises occupied by Customs since early in the 19th century.

The first jetty built at Fremantle in the 1830s was situated at the seaward end of the tunnel under the Round House and was used for landing goods and for whaling.

Nearly 25 years later another jetty was con-

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Photographs: MR R. HODGES, ACS Fremantle

structed near the fishmarkets — near Lombardo's. It is almost certain that the first Customs examining sheds and warehouses were sited around this second jetty.

Only coasters and other low-draught vessels could use the new jetty, so the process of

lightening for the discharge of larger overseas vessels continued.

In the earlier years of the colony, the bulk of underbond goods was lightered from ship to shore. Lighters were licensed by the Customs Department and owners faced stiff fines and forfeiture of their vessels if they did not comply with licensing requirements.

Passengers and cargo arriving in the colony travelled from the Esplanade area, along Cliff

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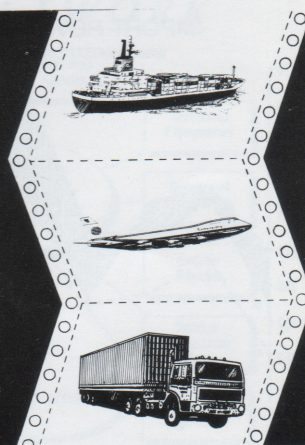
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Street, then east into Fremantle and along the High Street.

When daily boat services between Perth and Fremantle began in 1842, they could make their way to the fishmarkets jetty and then on to Perth by river.

The first official Customs House in Western Australia, at the corner of Henry Street and Marine Terrace, was occupied in 1862.

The WA Government gazette of that year notified regulations for the Customs House relating to hours of business, holidays and clearance of vessels.

The building, acquired from a Fremantle merchant Captain James McDermott who later drowned in a shipwreck in Mangles Bay, included upstairs living quarters for the then Collector of Customs, Mr L. W. Clifton.

By the 1860s, the increasing volume of trade prompted the building of a second jetty, known as Long Jetty.

Completed in 1873, it extended 2830 ft and had a draught of up to 21 ft. Long Jetty faced southwest from the end of Marine Terrace, in a direct line with Carnac Island, and as years passed and vessels of larger draught required berthage space, it was extended several times.

The jetty was the main artery for Fremantle's commerce and the increasing activity led to the Customs House being relocated within a Cliff Street building built in 1853 as a commissariat.

This building was constructed of stone from the Rocky Bay quarries and today is the site of the West Australian Maritime Museum.

The Georgian style building is a good example of solid pioneering construction and is a credit to its builders. It remains unimpaired to this day.

The Customs story has always been closely tied to the export trade. Sandalwood, timber, wool, guano, pearl shell, meat, gold, whale oil, wheat, livestock, fruit and, in later years, iron ore, gypsum, salt and mineral sands, have all led to the growth of the Department, whose presence in the late 1800s stretched from Eucla in the south to Wyndham in the north.

Trade was booming and the Long Jetty extended several times to cope.

In 1897, steamships began arriving in the newly constructed Fremantle Harbor; however, in October 1895, a fire completely destroyed the Customs goods shed in Cliff Street, along with merchandise worth \$75,000.

By 1903 the Customs Department was anxious to remain at the centre of shipping operations and accordingly shifted to temporary offices in the Australian Union Steamship Navigation Company's building in Phillimore Street.

Meanwhile, plans went ahead for the construction of a new Customs House on the corner of Phillimore and Cliff Streets, the site of the original Fremantle railway station.

The Commonwealth took possession of the site on 31 July 1907 when the new railway station was completed.

It was agreed by both Commonwealth and

State Governments that the property be treated as "transferred property", under Section 85 of the Constitution. (Due to legal implications the site was not formally acquired by the Commonwealth until November 1957.)

A contract worth £9710 to build the new Customs House was awarded to Warner & Ashman in November 1907. When it was completed on 12 August 1908, townsfolk saw a solid edifice of brick and Donnybrook stone.

Complemented by the solid timber doors, the attractive curved brick arches in the windows gave the building an air of style and endurance.

The two-storey building contained a main public room, which was flanked by smaller offices on the ground floor and overlooked by an impressive pressed-metal ceiling. The upper floor provided for the Collector and junior officers; caretaker's quarters were also incorporated.

The growth of the Customs Department led to the building being extended in 1927.

Further additions were made in 1967, creating a three-storey complex of offices, amenities and change rooms to accommodate some 60 Customs preventive officers.

In 1959, the pressure for accommodation was relieved somewhat with the transfer of the executive and administrative branches to the new Perth Commonwealth Building.

In the last few years, increasing trade, the

need to relocate all Customs activities under one roof and the impending Americas Cup resulted in the planning and construction of a new Customs House, duly opened by the Prime Minister on 7 February 1987.

The former Customs House closed for Customs matters late in 1986 and now houses some 25 visual artists, writers and filmmakers connected with the Fremantle Arts Foundation.

Recognising the historical importance of the old building, the Australian Heritage Commission entered the facade in the Register of the National Estate on 21 March 1978.

The new Customs House, on the corner of Henry and Phillimore Streets, provides more than 8000 square metres of office space and a 500-square-metre warehouse.

The pink and ochre colors of the two-level facade were selected to blend with the turn-of-the-century sandstone hues. The building, designed by Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown and constructed by Interstruct Pty Ltd, cost \$16.45 million.

For the first time, Customs staff are located under one roof, with facilities comparable to the best in the Public Service, including change rooms, amenities rooms and gymnasium.

It is fitting that the new Customs House can continue its tradition of service in an area close to where the first sailing ships, people and goods were landed — the gateway to Western Australia for about 140 years.

# Announcement

**Dianne Cassen (ACAIA)**

has joined **BUREAU PERSONNEL** and will continue to specialise in recruitment for the International Freight Forwarding and Customs Industries. She can be contacted on (02) 252 2722 during business hours or (02) 327 3731 after hours for confidential discussions.

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