

Heritage Citation



Ravenscraig

Key details

Addresses	At 223 Maundrell Terrace, Aspley, Queensland 4034
Type of place	Villa
Period	World War II 1939-1945
Style	Queenslander
Lot plan	L20_RP92044
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 July 2002 Date of Citation — February 2016
Construction	Roof: Tile; Walls: Face brick
People/associations	Mervyn Hamilton Rylance (Architect)

'Ravenscraig' was built in 1941 for businessman and state politician Arthur Bruce Pie and was the venue for discussions between Pie and Robert Menzies about the creation of the Liberal Party. Designed by prominent Brisbane architect Mervyn H. Rylance, it is reminiscent of the American ranch style and may be the last grand home constructed in Brisbane in World War II before wartime restrictions caused the cessation of non-military building projects. Other prominent residents of 'Ravenscraig' have included former University of Queensland Deputy Chancellor August Gehrman and chemist chain owner Max Talbot.

History

Aspley was first surveyed for sale and settlement in 1857 and developed as large allotments for farming, which continued well into the twentieth century. In 1941 Queensland Government politician, Arthur Bruce Pie, purchased a large allotment in Aspley on the crest of a hill as a site for his lavish semi-rural family home.

Born in 1902 at Coburg, Victoria, Pie was educated at Caulfield Grammar School before leaving at age 15 to work for the importers Harrisons, Ramsay Pty Ltd. In 1922 he was made merchandising manager in the firm's Brisbane office before returning to Melbourne to become the manager from 1924 to 1927. In 1925 Pie married Jean Margaret Wright and the couple went on to have six sons and one daughter. In 1927 he returned to Brisbane where he established the importing and manufacturing firm Bruce Pie & Co. in 1927. He then founded the Australian Bedding Company, a textile and manufacturing firm, which expanded in 1939 due to greater demand caused by the outbreak of World War II. Pie became interested in politics. He entered the Queensland Parliament as the Independent/Democrat Member for Hamilton in 1941, taking the seat from the leader of the conservative United Australia Party. Soon after this victory, Pie contracted architect Mervyn Rylance to design his family house on his Aspley land. Pie lodged a building application which was approved in early July 1941.

Mervyn Hamilton Rylance (1906-1983) was a prominent Brisbane-born architect who designed a number of residential and commercial buildings in the city from the 1930s through to the 1970s. Architect and architectural historian Michael Kennedy believed that Rylance was "the most important architect of the (interwar) period to design in the Mediterranean style in Brisbane".¹ Rylance's designs were influenced by the Mediterranean style that had developed in Sydney under Professor Leslie Wilkinson and F. Gynn Gilling. Gilling employed Rylance before he returned to Brisbane to establish a practice in 1933. Pie was an award winner in the 1935 Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Qld) 'Small Homes Competition'. This was considered the most important competition in domestic architecture at that time.

Rylance's design was a sprawling timber and brick, two-storey residence utilising then current American ranch style influences. It accommodated: two bedrooms; two bathrooms; dining room; smoking room; study; sunken lounge; a breakfast room that was separate from the kitchen; a maid's room, and a dormitory for their six boys. The house was named Ravenscraig after Ravenscraig Castle in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, where a Pie forebear, William Millie Pye had worked as an indentured mariner. It has been noted that:

A grand house, Ravenscraig was designed to accommodate the lifestyle of its politician owner and

his family with extensive spaces for entertaining and a quality of welcoming substantiality. More significantly, it illustrates another feature of Rylance's design approach which was to become more prevalent in later years, the physical separation by planning of occupational functions into clearly articulated and isolated zones.²

It was possibly the last grand house to be built in Brisbane during the World War II, as Japan's entry into the war in December 1941 soon led to an almost total government control over labour and building materials. The cost of the house was £2,900, a large expense for the period, and construction was completed by 1942, when the Pie family took up residence.

Pie remained the Member for Hamilton until 30 June 1943, when he resigned to run as a candidate for the seat of Brisbane in the 1943 Federal election. He returned to state parliament as the Member for Windsor on 15 April 1944. In 1944, the electoral destruction of the United Australia Party in Queensland saw the formation of the Queensland People's Party (QPP). It represented the non-Labor parties' "resurgence led by two prominent businessmen the Victorian-born Arthur Bruce Pie ... and English-born John Beals Chandler."³

During World War II, Robert Menzies would often stay at Ravenscraig while visiting Brisbane. There he would discuss the formation of a new conservative political party with Pie. The negotiations over the formation of the QPP and, later, the Queensland branch of the Liberal Party occurred at Ravenscraig. On 8 March 1946, Pie became chairman of the QPP. He joined the newly formed Liberal Party of Australia on 2 February 1948. After his seat of Windsor was abolished in a redistribution, Pie became the Member for Kedron on 29 April 1950. However, his disillusionment with politics had been growing since 1948 when he and fellow parliamentarian Johannes Bjelke-Petersen had refused a £200 pay rise for politicians.

During the Royal Commission into the Queensland Golden Casket Lottery held during 1950, Pie argued that the administration of the lottery was corrupt. In December 1950 Pie resigned from the Liberal Party. He followed this by resigning from state parliament on 6 January 1951 and he returned to his business and community interests.

Pie was managing director of the Queensland Textile Company Pty Ltd and the director of the Bankers and Traders Insurance Company. He was also a member of the Brisbane Club, the Royal Queensland Golf Club, Southport Golf Club, Southport Tattersalls Club and the Commercial Travellers' Association.

In March 1959, Pie began subdividing his 22 acres of land. Aspley was becoming a popular suburb for housing development and Pie wanted to benefit from this. The Pie Estate was surveyed by Cyril Fryar Bennett in June 1959 and the estate's streets were named Pie, Janie (after Pie's wife) and Dugald (after his son). However, Pie retained Ravenscraig on a large allotment as well as other holdings. It was transferred to trustees just prior to Pie's death on 31 July 1962. Pie was buried at Mount Thompson Crematorium.

On 29 March 1967 Ravenscraig was sold out of the Pie Estate's ownership and was occupied by a number of prominent owners over time.

Description

Ravenscraig was designed to accommodate the lifestyle of its politician owner and his family with extensive spaces for entertaining. It stands in an extensive, landscaped garden with mature trees and lawns.

The house has two roughly equal, single storey wings set at 90 degrees from an articulated central core with two levels. The ground floor of the core accommodates the entry hall, lounge, dining and smoking rooms, all of majestic scale, while upstairs are two bedrooms, study and bathroom. In one of the side wings is the breakfast room, kitchen and maid's quarters, in the other, separated by a breezeway covered by a pergola, the children's dormitory.

It has a lower storey of brick and the upper of neatly finished chamferboard. The house, effectively only one room deep in most places and with large multi-paned windows shaded by verandahs at ground level, is light and airy internally with an external outlook onto the landscaped garden. Smaller windows, warm-toned panelling and the formal fireplace in the smoking room/ library create a more intimate and cosy atmosphere. It retains original internal detailing and fixtures such as the library fit-out and the internal stairs with their graceful balustrading.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as a grand semi-rural retreat built during World War II that indicates Aspley's development from farming community to affluent postwar suburb.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as one of the last grand homes to be built in Brisbane during World War II before wartime shortages overran the local building industry.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a grand, American ranch style house designed by prominent Brisbane architect Mervyn H. Rylance.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as a house built for businessman and prominent conservative politician Albert Bruce Pie; and as a house designed by prominent Brisbane architect Mervyn H. Rylance.

References

1. Cock, John, *A Question of Style: The life and work of Mervyn Hamilton Rylance, Architect 1906-1983*, (Bachelor of Architecture thesis, Charles Fulton School of Architecture, Interior and Industrial Design, Q.U.T., 1995), p. 76
2. Cock, John, *A Question of Style – the life and work of Mervyn Hamilton Rylance Architect 1906-1983*, p.30
3. Fitzgerald, Ross, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s – A History of Queensland*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), p.100
4. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website
5. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
6. Brisbane City Council's Central Library, Local History – Zillmere – Geebung – Aspley –Bald Hills
7. Brisbane City Council, *New Buildings Register January 1941 to December 1941*
8. Cock, John, *A Question of Style: The life and work of Mervyn Hamilton Rylance, Architect 1906-1983*, (Bachelor of Architecture thesis, Charles Fulton School of Architecture, Interior and Industrial Design, Queensland University of Technology, 1995
9. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
10. Fitzgerald, Ross. *From 1915 To The Early 1980's: A History of Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984
11. John Oxley Library, *Parish of Nundah, County of Stanley, L.A.D. of Brisbane map*, (1899 land grant map).
12. Kennedy, Michael Owen, *Domestic Architecture in Queensland Between the Wars*, (UNSW. Master of

Built Environment graduate report, January 1989)

13. Talbot, Max, *History of 'Ravenscraig'*, commissioned manuscript
 14. Teague, D.R., *The History of Aspley*, (Brisbane: Colonial Press, 1972).
 15. Waterson D.B., & Arnold J., *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1930-1980*, Canberra, Australian National University, 1982
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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