



Heritage Citation



551 Royal Esplanade, Manly

Key details

Addresses	At 551 Royal Esplanade, Manly, Queensland 4178
Type of place	House
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Spanish Mission
Lot plan	L4_RP102330; L7_RP102330; L5_RP102330; L6_RP33160; L7_RP33160; L5_RP33160; L3_RP102330
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004 Date of Citation — August 2012
Construction	Roof: Terracotta tile; Walls: Masonry

People/associations Eric Percival Trewern (Architect);
William Denis O'Connor (Occupant)

Criterion for listing (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

This house was built in 1936 for prominent Brisbane hotelier and Queensland Brewery Limited director, William Denis O'Connor. He had been associated with the Wynnum-Manly area for many years, having become the proprietor of the popular Waterloo Bay Hotel in 1898. O'Connor contracted E.P. Trewern from the leading firm of Brisbane architects of the Interwar period to design the new house. Trewern is acknowledged as an influential architect through his innovative use of the Spanish Mission style. This residence is the only example of a Trewern Spanish Mission design built in any of Brisbane's byside suburbs.

History

Wynnum publican William Denis O'Connor purchased the land on which this house was constructed gradually and in sections. He bought subdivisions 6, 7, 171 and 172 of Resubdivision 3 of subdivision 1 of Portion 79, comprising two roods, on 30 January 1911. He purchased subdivisions 5 and 170 of Resubdivision 3 of subdivision 1 of Portion 79, comprising one rood, on 1 November 1911. He purchased subdivisions 8 and 9 of Resubdivision 3 of subdivision 1 of Portion 79, comprising one rood, on 26 August 1936.

W.D. O'Connor was a member of a family of major Brisbane hoteliers. William D. O'Connor owned numerous licenced establishments around Brisbane, including the Shamrock Hotel at 186 Brunswick Street and the Prince Consort Hotel at 230 Wickham Street, both in Fortitude Valley and the Treasury Hotel at 175 George Street in the City. But he is most remembered for his ownership of the Waterloo Bay Hotel at 75 Berrima Street, Wynnum and his involvement in the local Wynnum-Manly community. O'Connor maintained ownership of the Waterloo Bay Hotel from August 1898 until his death in 1950. While remaining the proprietor of the hotel, he often leased the popular hotel to a variety of licencees, commencing in 1901 with Bernard Kennedy.

In 1929, The Brisbane Courier praised O'Connor's reputation and efforts in the Wynnum-Manly area:

"In Mr. W.D. O'Connor the district has a generous and public spirited gentleman, ever ready to assist a deserving cause and a keen follower of sport."¹

One example of his support for sport was his establishment of a Sports Grounds adjacent to the Waterloo Bay Hotel, from where he organised an annual woodchop contest. In 1937, William D. O'Connor joined the board of directors of Queensland Brewery Limited (brewers of Bulimba Bitter and Gold Top beers), the rival company to Castlemaine Perkins. He occupied the seat on the brewery's board of directors that had been filled by his brother Denis, until the latter's death. At the time of his appointment on 28 July 1937, William O'Connor indicated that he would retire from the retail side of the brewing trade. Although the Queensland Brewery Limited's headquarters was located at 501 Ann Street in Fortitude Valley, O'Connor did not relocate closer to the City, but instead chose to retain his links to Wynnum-Manly. It is likely that his new residence at Manly was designed to be his retirement home. Previously, he and his family had been residing at the Waterloo Bay Hotel.

By the 1930's, Manly had developed from its origins as a seaside tourist spot for campers and day-trippers into a Brisbane suburb. Reflecting the increasing number of permanent residents in the district, the Wynnum Shire Council was created in 1902. The shire council became a town council, with its own mayor in 1913. It was amalgamated into the Greater Brisbane City Council in 1925. Manly was connected to electricity by 1923. In 1933, a Great Depression relief work program completed a large, impressive, stone retaining wall in Falcon Street, close to W.D. O'Connor's land. This 7.5 metre-tall structure featuring a rock face that was 3 metres thick became a local tourist attraction that became known as "The Great Wall of Manly". Such improvements drew more tourists.

The site, chosen by O'Connor for his new home, was located on the lower slopes of Manly Hill, overlooking Moreton Bay. It provided a scenic view of the tourist spots of the Manly Jetty, the Manly (saltwater) baths and the Manly kiosk. It was located within walking distance of the Manly town centre in Cambridge Parade. While the property ran beside Valetta Street, this street did not connect to Royal Esplanade. Instead beach access was gained via a set of timber stairs built at the end of Valetta Street. Thus O'Connor's new residence was to have its address listed as Valetta Street and not Royal Esplanade. It had taken O'Connor 25 years to acquire a block of land that satisfied his needs. Next he contracted the leading firm of Brisbane architects of the Interwar period, to produce a design for a large, impressive, modern home to occupy this corner, hillside block.

Influential Brisbane architect Eric Percival (E.P.) Trewern (1895-1959) designed the house in the Spanish Mission style. Victorian-trained Trewern established his Brisbane architectural practice in 1920 at an address in Queen Street, Brisbane. The practice continued until Trewern's death in 1959. He is still renowned for his innovative designs incorporating the Spanish Mission and the Old English/Tudor revival style in residential and commercial architecture. Trewern designed many commercial buildings in central Brisbane, but unfortunately many of these no longer exist. One important extant commercial building is the Inchcolm Professional Chambers at 73 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill.

The Australian Institute of Architects describes Trewern as having "the most successful residential [architecture] firm of the interwar period" in Brisbane.² He was a vice-president and then president of the Queensland Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. In his official obituary that appeared in *The Courier Mail* on 30 November 1959, he was lauded for having designed many leading city dwellings, including the Coorparoo Methodist Church that was to be the venue for his funeral. Despite designing many houses across Brisbane, the O'Connor residence at 551 Royal Esplanade, Manly was the only Spanish Mission style home that Trewern designed in any of Brisbane's bayside suburbs.

William O'Connor died on 14 January 1950. He was buried at St. Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane's principal Catholic church and he was buried at Nudgee (Catholic) Cemetery. In summing-up William's life, *The Courier Mail* stated that "Mr. O'Connor was well known in Brisbane for many years" due to his work in the hotel industry, particularly through his involvement with the Waterloo Bay Hotel.³

After W.D. O'Connor's death, his home passed to Douglas Wadley and Graham Denis O'Connor. G.D. O'Connor took sole ownership of the property on 14 August 1951. The property left the hands of the O'Connor family on 11 June 1952, when it was transferred to John C. Anderson. He further benefitted from the strategic location of the O'Connor residence, when its scenic views were enhanced further after the Manly Boat Harbour opened in 1958. This is the largest small-craft anchorage in Queensland and it was, fortuitously, built straight across the road from the O'Connor residence.

In 1988, Trewern's design of 551 Royal Esplanade was featured in *Well Made Plans* that was an exhibition of

drawings, organised by the University of Queensland's Fryer Library, from its Queensland Architecture Archive. This Exhibition noted that:

"The Spanish style was popularised in Brisbane in the 1920s by a number of architects who (inaccurately in retrospect) related the climate of Spain (and the west coast of North America) to that of southern Qld....E.P.Trewern was a notable exponent of the style for houses....the O'Connor residence has all his hallmarks – arcade with wrought iron grilles, cordova tiles and a picturesque assemblage of roofs.⁴

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:

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a good example of the Spanish Mission architectural style, demonstrating its major components of semi-circular arches, arcade and Cordova tiles.

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 the purpose-built home of prominent Brisbane hotelier and bayside identity William Denis O'Connor and as the only bayside Spanish Mission style home that was designed by the influential Interwar architect E.P. Trewern.

References

1. "Waterloo Bay Hotel" in *The Brisbane Courier*, 24 October 1929
2. Australian Institute of Architects, *Nationally Significant 20th-Century Architecture – ‘Santa Barbara’*, in http://www.architecture.com.au/emailnews/national/Heritage/03_QLD-Santa-Barbara-citation-FINAL.pdf, 16 April 2010
3. "£134,577 Left by hotelkeeper", *The Courier Mail*, 9 June 1950
4. Fryer Memorial Library, *Well Made Plans – Catalogue of an Exhibition of Drawings from the Queensland Architecture Archive in the Fryer Memorial Library University of Queensland*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Library, 1988). P. 28
5. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website
6. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
7. Fryer Memorial Library, *Plan of Proposed Brick Residence, Oceana Terrace and Valetta Street, Manly*, (Brisbane: Eric P. Trewern, 1936)
8. John Oxley Library, biographical clippings file – Trewern
9. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised June 2022)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane