

Heritage Citation



St Mary's Retreat

Key details

Also known as	The Fort
Addresses	At 199 Fort Road, Oxley, Queensland 4075
Type of place	Residence (group), House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Queenslander
Lot plan	L7_SP172192; L8_SP172192
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004 Date of Citation — April 2003
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber

People/associations	Henry William Coxen and family (Occupant)
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Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association
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This house was built in the early 1880s for Henry William Coxen, one of the pioneering graziers in south-east Queensland. He established Jondaryan station on the Darling Downs and was Chairman of the Sherwood Division in 1902. From 1955-1962, this large property of 12.4 hectares was acquired by the Provincial of the Congregation of the Passion in Australasia. It is now used as a retreat centre and home for the Passionist Fathers in Queensland.

History

In 1865, Henry Coxen purchased 24 acres and 1 rood of riverfront land at Oxley with William Sim for £59 15s. In 1866, Coxen became the sole owner of the land. Coxen added to his property at Oxley in 1870 when he purchased an adjoining 8 acres, and again in 1883 when he purchased another eight acres of riverfront land.

Coxen moved with his wife and four children to Oxley in 1880 when he was 57 years old. He probably built this house in the early 1880s, as he was Chairman of the Yeerongpilly Divisional Board (similar to a shire council) in 1887. The post office directories show him residing in Oxley at "The Fort" in 1889. Local historians have speculated that the house was named after a fort in Mumbai (Bombay), India, situated on a similarly elevated site above a river.

William Coxen's 92 years of life were full of adventure and pioneering achievements. A gunshot wound during his school days at Eton rendered his right hand virtually useless. Unable to enter the army like his father, he was sent to Australia at the age of 15 years, and after a short spell in Tasmania, went to work with his uncle, Stephen Coxen, on his farm in the Hunter Valley. In 1842, at the age of 19, he followed in Patrick Leslie's footsteps and drove 300 cattle from NSW into the Darling Downs. During this time, he acquired grazing land and established Jondaryan Station. This was the first of 17 large grazing leases in which he had a financial investment. The Australian Dictionary of Biography describes William Coxen as "one of the best-known and most prosperous of Queensland pastoralists." Coxen's strong ties to England saw him make two trips back to the 'mother country' and import the first Cotswold Sheep (short-woolled) from England. This was during the boom-time for the wool industry, and his gains from sheep helped to off-set his losses from speculations in the South African sugar industry and foreign securities.

Oxley was a relatively isolated place to live in the 1880s, as the Albert Bridge, which provided a rail link to Indooroopilly and then to Brisbane, was not built until 1876 and the Walter Taylor Bridge, which provided a cross-river service for pedestrians and cars, was not built until 1936. It was quite common for locals to marry locals, as courting someone "cross river" was so arduous. Coxen's daughter, Sarah, maintained this tradition when she married James C Hassall, the son of the local Anglican Minister. Coxen built a house for them, named "Eddystone", in Oxley in 1883. Eddystone street is named after this house.

For the last 20 years of his life, Coxen stayed in the Oxley area and focused his interests on the Freemasons and local politics. He was Chairman of the Yeerongpilly Divisional Board in 1887, and with other rate-payers

was successful in petitioning the Queensland Government to create the Sherwood Shire in 1891. He chairman of the Sherwood Shire Council from 1901-3. Henry Coxen died on 21 August 1915. One of his sons Walter Adams, fought in World War I and rose to the rank of Major-General in the Australian Imperial Forces. His eldest son, Henry Charles Coxen was chief of staff of the Queensland Department of Public Works.

From 1955-1962, the Provincial of the Congregation of the Passion in Australasia acquired the land that had once belonged to Coxen. Two Cannons were purchased from Brisbane City Council c.1955 and placed on raised stone platforms on either side of the house. In the 1970s these were removed however the platforms still remain. "The Fort" is used as a retreat centre and guest house by the Passionist Fathers. The Passionist Order was founded in Italy in 1721 by St Paul Danie' of the Cross. Passionist Priests established a mission to the Aborigines of Stradbroke Island in 1843, making them one of the first religious groups to come to the Brisbane area. The Passionist Fathers commemorate Mass at The Fort, now called St Mary's Retreat, every Sunday.

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 evidence of the residential development of Oxley in the nineteenth century.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance as a fine example of a colonial style residence maintained in a rural setting on a large block.

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 former residence of Queensland Pioneer and prominent grazier, Henry William Coxen and his family.

References

1. Australian Dictionary of Biography, v.3, p. 488 and v. 7 p.131
 2. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
 3. *The Daily Mail*, 17 May 1919, p.10.
 4. Department of Natural Resources, Certificates of Title
 5. Mander, Bess 1999, "Bridges of our district" in Fones, Ralph ed. *Oxley-Chelmer: places, patriarchs and pastimes*, Oxley-Chelmer History Group
 6. Mahony, Fr. Gerard C.P., *A Brief Encounter: Aborigines and Passionists Stradbroke Island 1843-1846*, Passionist Provincial Office, NSW
 7. Queensland Ecclesiastical Directory, 1883
 8. *Queensland Pioneers Index 1829-1889*
 9. Queensland Post Office Directories
 10. *Sherwood centenary 1867-1967: a record of events and the history and growth of the Sherwood District during the past 100 years*
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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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