

Wollongong City Council

Heritage assessment report for 32-34 Church Street WOLLONGONG

1. Summary

This report presents an assessment of heritage significance of properties at 32 and 34 Church Street, Wollongong, deemed to comprise elements and structures of potential heritage significance. The report has been prepared in the context of assessment of the development application DA-2011/718 to Wollongong City Council.

Recommendations of this assessment indicate that Wollongong City Council (WCC) should consider heritage listing archaeological deposits on the site; however, the extant buildings and gardens are found to not meet the criteria for heritage listing.

The sites and their features and elements were assessed against the NSW Heritage Council's criteria for heritage listing. The applicable inclusion and exclusion guidelines were bolded for easier reference.

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Basic information:

The site comprises archaeological relics related to *Bustle Hall*, residence of Charles Throsby Smith, the founder of the township of Wollongong. Bustle Hall was built c. 1826-1828 as the first substantial private residence in the area that is now part of the township. The land of the estate originally covered 300 acres, and was gradually subdivided in 1879, 1913 and the 1930s. The house of Bustle Hall, renamed Buena Vista, was demolished c. 1935 to allow for a further redevelopment of its immediate grounds and the two houses currently at 32 and 34 Church Street were both created post-1937.

The house grounds of both Nos. 32 and 34 include cultivated mature gardens, albeit no natural elements of heritage significance were noted.

The past tenants and owners of these two houses include a number of locally known residents, however, none that would be particularly significant in the course of history of the local area or Wollongong City. The house at 34 Church Street was long-time home of Rowena Milgrove.

Rowena Milgrove was locally known as the owner and operator of Regent Theatre for 47 years (1957 to 2004). According to a newspaper article: "*Ms Milgrove's father, Herbert Jones, bought the site in 1934 but construction was delayed until after World War II. It was eventually built in 1954 by Ms Milgrove's brother, Maurice Jones, with foreman Norm Vormister and builder Ron Baxter. When it opened in 1957, with lavish art deco styling, it quickly asserted itself as the grandest picture theatre in the region. But when Ms Milgrove, known as the Queen of the Screen, died in 2004, its future became uncertain.*" ("Theatre up for Sale", Illawarra Mercury, 26/03/2009, p.7).

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Buildings currently at Nos 34 (left) and 32 (right) Church Street, Wollongong

(A) An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (State significance); OR An item is important in the course, or pattern, of the local area's cultural or natural history (local significance).

Inclusion:

- shows evidence of a significant human activity
- **is associated with a significant activity or historical phase**
- maintains or shows the continuity of a historical process or activity

The archaeological relics on the site are associated with a significant historic phase of early European settlement in Illawarra. These associations are significant on State level.

Exclusion:

- has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important activities or processes
- provides evidence of activities or processes that are of dubious historical importance
- has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association

The extant buildings and landscaping elements on the two sites do not meet this criterion.

(B) An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (State significance); OR An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the cultural or natural history of the local area (local significance)

Inclusion:

- shows evidence of a significant human occupation
- **is associated with a significant event, person, or group of persons**

The wider location and, particularly, the archaeological material in ground, are associated with Charles Throsby Smith, founder of Wollongong. These associations are significant on State level.

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<p>Exclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important people or events • provides evidence of people or events that are of dubious historical importance • has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association 	<p>The extant buildings and landscaping elements on the two sites do not meet this criterion as they provide no significant associations with historically important people or events.</p> <p>The personality of Rowena Milgrove is recognised in part of the community; however, this recognition is not universal (e.g. she is not included in Australian Dictionary of Biography or any similar register of persons). In any case, the importance of the recognised associations does not extend to her private home as the house does not readily exhibit the evidence of this particular association.</p>
<p>(C) An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (State significance); OR An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in the local area (local significance)</p>	
<p>Inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows or is associated with, creative or technical innovation or achievement • is the inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement • is aesthetically distinctive • has landmark qualities • exemplifies a particular taste, style or technology 	<p>See exclusion criteria below.</p>
<p>Exclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not a major work by an important designer or artist • has lost its design or technical integrity • its positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities have been more than temporarily degraded • has only a loose association with a creative or technical achievement 	<p>In the current configuration, the extant houses have lost their positive visual or sensory appeal and scenic qualities presumably permanently and they cannot be described as aesthetically distinctive.</p>

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(D) An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons (State significance); OR An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in the area for social, cultural or spiritual reasons (local significance).	
Inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is important for its associations with an identifiable group • is important to a community's sense of place 	<p>The associations with C T Smith are important for the general public and its sense of place. This significance is on local area level and potentially State level.</p> <p>The significance of Rowena Milgrove, recognised in parts of the community, is mostly linked with the importance of the Regent Theatre. These associations are recognised through SHR listing of the Regent Theatre; however, they are not necessarily encapsulated in fabric and may be suitably commemorated by other, alternative means.</p>
Exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is only important to the community for amenity reasons • is retained only in preference to a proposed alternative 	<p>The extant buildings and landscaping elements on the two sites do not share these associations and do not meet this criterion.</p>
(E) An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (State significance); OR An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the area's cultural or natural history (local significance).	
Inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has the potential to yield new or further substantial scientific and/or archaeological information • is an important benchmark or reference site or type • provides evidence of past human cultures that is unavailable elsewhere 	<p>The site has a very high likelihood of comprising archaeological relics with important new knowledge and significance on State level.</p>
Exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the knowledge gained would be irrelevant to research on science, human history or culture • has little archaeological or research potential • only contains information that is readily available from other resources or archaeological sites 	<p>The extant buildings and landscaping elements on the two sites do not meet this criterion.</p>

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(F) An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (State significance); OR An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the area's cultural or natural history (local significance).	
Inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides evidence of a defunct custom, way of life or process • demonstrates a process, custom or other human activity that is in danger of being lost • shows unusually accurate evidence of a significant human activity • is the only example of its type • demonstrates designs or techniques of exceptional interest • shows rare evidence of a significant human activity important to a community 	The archaeology on the site is relating to the oldest major residence in Wollongong.
Exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not rare • is numerous but under threat 	N/A
(G) An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments (State significance); OR An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of the area's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments (local significance).	
Inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a fine example of its type • has the principal characteristics of an important class or group of items • has attributes typical of a particular way of life, philosophy, custom, significant process, design, technique or activity • is a significant variation to a class of items • is part of a group which collectively illustrates a representative type • is outstanding because of its setting, condition or size • is outstanding because of its integrity or the esteem in which it is held 	The archaeology on the site is likely to provide new or additional information on the Colonial period in Illawarra.
Exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a poor example of its type • does not include or has lost the range of characteristics of a type • does not represent well the characteristics that make up a significant variation of a type 	However, the extant buildings and landscaping elements on the two sites do not accurately represent the characteristics of their respective architectural types.

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Comment: There are clearly values of the underground deposits on the sites of 32 and 34 Church Street, Wollongong. In terms of NSW Heritage Council's criteria for listing, the results of this assessment indicate that the archaeology of the site meets inclusion criteria on State level. However, the extant buildings and site gardens and other landscaping elements are deemed to not meet the listing criteria. The integrity levels, as applicable to these types of "items", are sporadic and disputable while the perceived "danger" of redevelopment would not be a suitable justification for these elements to be heritage listed.

Regarding 34 Church Street and its associations with Rowena Milgrove, it is noted that private residences of notable people are generally heritage listed only if the built fabric retains the ability to demonstrate historical themes. In that context, it is also noted that Rowena Milgrove was locally known, albeit she is not included in any of the widely accepted registers of notable persons, such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography (online: <http://adb.anu.edu.au>).

An example of notable person's private residence listed as heritage item is Ben Chifley's house in Bathurst area. The house has been described in SHR as "the only known example of a house in New South Wales occupied by a Labor prime minister throughout his adult life and which retains an ability to demonstrate the occupancy of that prime minister and the associations between that prime minister, his lifestyle, political views and projected image." It is fair to say that the house at 34 Church Street does not exhibit associations of this level, being only associated with Rowena Milgrove's private life, rather than with her significant work.

Integrity: the archaeology on the site would have a high degree of integrity as it was protected by layers of ground in the recent decades. The houses have a relatively lower level of integrity, being modified in the recent decades (incl. No. 32 apparently divided into flats). The gardens are not of significant design and are presumed to have no significant natural elements, in heritage terms. Their integrity is deemed compromised and does not in any way reflect early plantings, which were cleared, and current gardens created in different locations and with different replacement species.

Statement of Significance

The archaeological site at 32-34 Crown Street, Wollongong is of significance for the State of NSW for historical reasons, associative, social and scientific reasons. The site was the location of *Bustle Hall*, the earliest major residence in the Wollongong area and the home of Charles Throsby Smith, the founder of Wollongong. The locality has social significance for the general community and is likely to contain relics that may be either rare or representative in the State context. The other elements on the site, including buildings and landscaping, are not considered to be of sufficient heritage interest to warrant protection.

Recommendation

The site of 32-34 Church Street, Wollongong should be listed as an archaeological item in the schedules of the Wollongong LEP. The listing should not apply to extant buildings and site landscaping.

Curtilage

Refer to the State Heritage Register listing.

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Recommended Management

The archaeological clauses of the NSW Heritage Act apply to all works that would disturb grounds of the site. In case of redevelopment, an archival recording of extant site elements is recommended. Given the underground nature of significant elements, it is recommended to interpret significance of the site to the general public as part of any major development.

This report and assessment were prepared by:

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