



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 8.6.4 Making places for worship

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 406 Religion
- 504 Depression & boom

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is a fine, monumental scale example of a church designed in the Interwar Art Deco style. (Criterion 1.1)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is an imposing landmark building that is particularly notable for its large scale in a relatively small and remote country town. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross represents the strength and optimism of the Catholic Church in the region at this time. (Criterion 2.1)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross, substantially funded by personal donations from Spain and erected at a time when the Southern Cross Catholic Parish was under the auspices of the Spanish-influenced New Norcia Benedictine Community, is a continuing reminder of the historic links between Spain and parts of the Western Australian Catholic community. (Criterion 2.1)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is indicative of the growth of Southern Cross and its importance to the State during the Great Depression when the revival of gold mining played an important role in the revival of the State and the Nation. (Criterion 2.2)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross has close associations with the order of Benedictine Monks at New Norcia, a significant monastic community. (Criterion 2.3)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross was designed by architectural firm Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Tracey who were responsible for the design of a number of significant ecclesiastical buildings in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross reflects the religious culture and theological understandings of the community that built it and has the ability to reveal important information about the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the Catholic Church, particularly during a time of economic hardship. (Criterion 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is important to the local community as evidenced by their support and assistance in funding and constructing the church. (Criterion 4. 1)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is important to the local community for its continuing role as a place of worship and meeting place for the Catholic community of the area. (Criterion 4. 1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is unique in Western Australia and rare in Australia as a monumental Interwar Art Deco style church. (Criterion 5. 1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is a fine example of Art Deco styling applied to a church. (Criterion 6.1)

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross represents the evolution of ecclesiastical design after World War One away from traditional Gothic church design. (Criterion 6. 2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is in fair to good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross has a high degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross retains a large proportion of its original fabric and form with only minor alterations and additions.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

This document has been based on the 'Our Lady of Montserrat Church, Southern Cross Conservation Management Plan (Draft)', prepared by Laura Gray, Heritage & Conservation Consultant, and Irene Sauman, Historian, for the owners in July 2009 with amendments and/or additions by State Heritage Office staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the documentary evidence refer to the 'Our Lady of Montserrat Church, Southern Cross Conservation Management Plan (Draft)', prepared by Laura Gray, Heritage & Conservation Consultant, and Irene Sauman, Historian, for the owners in July 2009, pp. 5-21.

During the years that Southern Cross parish was under the auspices of the New Norcia diocese, 1904 to 1961, the place was likely influenced by the Spanish flavour of New Norcia. The New Norcia Abbot had authority over the Southern Cross parish, choosing which priests were to serve the town and also managing arrangements for the sisters who ran St Joseph's School. In addition to these hierarchical links, social links were also developed, such as when the sisters spent school holidays at New Norcia.¹

The New Norcia Benedictine community had a long association with Spain, beginning with the founding monks Salvado and Serra, who came from the monastery of St Martin in Compostela. Later monks had strong links with the Catalan Monastery of Montserrat, northwest of Barcelona. Father Fulgentius Torres came from Montserrat to become New Norcia's Abbot from 1901 to 1914, and Dom Lesmes, the monk artist responsible for many of the fine murals and other artworks at new Norcia, was also from Montserrat.² Catalan was reportedly spoken at New Norcia in the twentieth century.³ Fr Emilian Planas, who served at Southern Cross and oversaw construction of the 1936 church, was also from this area.⁴

In the 1930s, at the time that *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* was built, the Abbot and most of the monks at New Norcia were Spanish. The emotional connection with Spain was particularly strong in this period as the Spanish Civil War and the years leading to it saw waves of anticlericalism, with churches destroyed and thousands of priests and monks killed, including some known personally by the New Norcia monks and Fr Emilian Planas' brother who had funded the construction of *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*. Although the Spanish influence gradually declined, there were still three Spanish monks within the community by the end of the twentieth century.⁵

¹ Carter, Anne & Murphy, Elizabeth, *A Rich Harvest: St Gertrude's College*, Sisters of the Sacred Heart, South Peth WA, 2006, p.21.

² The Benedictine Community of New Norcia, WA, 'The Story of New Norcia: The Western Australian Benedictine Mission', 7th edition, 1991, pp.7, 32, 39.

³ Pyke, L.H. 'Research Study of the town of New Norcia and related Mission establishments', 1997, South East Metropolitan College of TAFE, Bentley WA.

⁴ Hunt, L. *Yilgarn: Good Country for Hardy People*, Shire of Yilgarn, Southern Cross WA, 1988, p.247.

⁵ Perez-Molina, Isabel, "Por Dios y por la Patria" Francoism and the Spanish Benedictine Mission at New Norcia, Western Australia, during the Spanish Civil War, in *New Norcia Studies*, No.8, September 2000, p.45.

Father Peter Celestine Gusi, who drew the original sketch plans for the place, was a Benedictine monk visiting from Montserrat in Spain who went on to be the Abbot of the Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat in Manila, Philippines.⁶ No further information about Gusi or his architectural work has been located.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the physical evidence refer to the 'Our Lady of Montserrat Church, Southern Cross Conservation Management Plan (Draft)', prepared by Laura Gray, Heritage & Conservation Consultant, and Irene Sauman, Historian, for the owners with funds through Lotterywest in July 2009, pp. 22-40.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

For a discussion of the documentary evidence refer to the 'Our Lady of Montserrat Church, Southern Cross Conservation Management Plan (Draft)', prepared by Laura Gray, Heritage & Conservation Consultant, and Irene Sauman, Historian, for the owners in July 2009, p. 41-42. Some additional comparative information is provided below.

Cavanagh & Cavanagh

There are 19 churches in the HCWA database noted as designed in whole or in part by either Michael Cavanagh or Cavanagh & Cavanagh Architects. Nine of these are Registered, being:

P00379 *Convent of Mercy Group (fmr)*, Bunbury (18897-1924, Federation Gothic style); P00835 *St Patrick's Basilica and St Patrick's Presbytery*, Fremantle (1900-1916, Federation Gothic); P02030 *St Brigid's Group, Perth*, (18898-1921, Federation Gothic, Queen Anne and Free styles); P00124 *St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral*, Perth, (1865-1930, Victorian Academic Classical); P002218 *Redemptorist Monastery & Church*, North Perth, (1903-1967, Federation Gothic); P002231 *Catherine McAuley Centre*, Wembley, (1858-1990, varying styles); P02396 *Administration Building & Chapel, Aquinas College*, (1937, Interwar Gothic); and, P02401 *Clontarf*, Waterford, (1901-1999, Victorian and Interwar Romanesque).

Art Deco style churches - Western Australia

A search of the State Heritage Office database returns six entries for churches constructed between 1925 and 1945 in the Interwar Art Deco style. Of these two are on the State Register both of which are in the metropolitan area.

- P2385 *St Mary's Anglican Church Complex*, South Perth
- P11595 *First Church of Christ, Scientist, Perth*

Neither are directly comparable to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* (refer to images in the Conservation Plan, p.41).

The heritage inventories of the Catholic and Anglican Dioceses of Perth and the Uniting Church Synod of Western Australia include the following places that have some similarities to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*. (Note: both

⁶ San Beda (Manila) Benedictine Community website – Abbey Church
[http://www.sanbeda.edu.ph/San%20Beda%20College%20-%20Benedictine%20Abbey\(Abbey%20Church\).html](http://www.sanbeda.edu.ph/San%20Beda%20College%20-%20Benedictine%20Abbey(Abbey%20Church).html) accessed 25 Feb 2011

Dioceses of Perth stretch east to include the goldfields and a portion of the wheat belt but do not include the Southwest, Great Southern or Midwest regions)

The most strongly comparable church is P13019 Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, East Fremantle, a double-volume unpainted brick church in the Interwar Art Deco style dating from c.1940, which is included in the HCWA assessment program. Although it does not feature a tower, its massing, scale, materials and detailing are similar to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*.

P01830 St Margaret's Anglican Church, Nedlands, is a 1937 brick church designed by W.G. Bennett in the Interwar Gothic Revival style with Art Deco detailing. Its scale and unpainted brickwork are similar to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* but it does not feature a tower. It is included in the HCWA assessment program.

P02383 *St Columba's Church Group & St Joseph's Convent, South Perth* (RHP) includes the 1937 St Columba's Church, which is of a similar scale to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* and features a dominant tower. However, its smooth-rendered Interwar Romanesque appearance with Spanish Mission detailing is dissimilar.

P2428 St Patrick's Anglican Church in Beaufort Street Mount Lawley (1936), which is in HCWA's assessment program, is a red brick church with elongated Romanesque windows and an imposing tower. It is similar in scale to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* but other stylistic elements are less comparable, with a steeply pitched tile roof and the tower attached to the side rather than the entrance of the church.

P02225 *St Peter's Anglican Church & Memorial Hall, Victoria Park* (1935, RHP) is also a similar scale but its smooth rendered concrete walls with Romanesque detailing makes it overall dissimilar to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*.

P1936 *St Joseph's Church, Perenjori* has some similarities in form though it does not have a tower. Constructed from brick it has been rendered. Stylistically the place is classed as Interwar Romanesque, and has attributes more in line with Interwar Spanish Mission than Interwar Art Deco.

Churches with towers constructed between 1925 and 1945 in a similar style to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* are not common.

A small number of 1960s-1970s churches include a tower and have similar scale and materials to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*, including P09849 Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church, Woodlands (1970, Late Twentieth Century Organic, HCWA assessment program); P13038 St Bernadette's Catholic Church, Glendalough (1961, Post War Ecclesiastical) and P11503 Holy Trinity Church, East Victoria Park (1964, Post War Ecclesiastical). However, they are clearly more modern in style than the 1936 *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*.

Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross is rare as an Interwar church of monumental scale, and as an Interwar Art Deco style building. On the evidence available, it appears to be unique in Western Australia.

Art Deco style churches - Australia

A search of the Australian Heritage Places Inventory for Art Deco churches returns only two examples. Ipswich Baptist Church (fmr), QLD, is an 1877

building with a substantial Art Deco facade added in 1938. It is not directly comparable with *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*. Primitive Methodist Church (fmr) is an 1855 church used from 1902 as a school and remodelled in 1921 and 1929 to be a Picture Theatre and then Ballroom, while retaining the original church function.⁷ However, this Inventory is difficult to search for specific styles and its coverage varies from state to state.

The Victorian Heritage Database includes one church designed in the 'Interwar Moderne-Classical' style, the equivalent of Art Deco in that database. It is Second Church of Christ Scientist, in Camberwell, constructed 1937. However, the building has no tower, is designed with overlapping cuboids of cream brickwork, and has more in common visually with council chambers or a public hall than with a church.⁸ St Patrick's Catholic Church, Mentone, is included in the database on account of its significant historic pipe organ, which was relocated to the building from an older church in the area. No date or architectural style for the church is given. The photograph supplied shows some similarities to *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* in scale, materials and the inclusion of a dominant tower (albeit at the side rather than the front) but is likely to be a post-World War Two building.⁹

There are no comparable churches on the Northern Territory Heritage Register.¹⁰ The Queensland Heritage Register includes no Art Deco style churches. Only three churches constructed in the 1920s, 30s or 40s are included in the Register, none of which are comparable with *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross*.¹¹ Information about potential comparable places in other state heritage lists is unavailable online.¹² Officers at the state heritage agencies in South Australia, Northern Territory and Tasmania could not identify any comparable churches.¹³

On the information available, *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* is rare within Australia as an Art Deco church.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

'Our Lady of Montserrat Church, Southern Cross Conservation Management Plan (Draft)', prepared by Laura Gray, Heritage & Conservation Consultant, and Irene Sauman, Historian, for the owners in July 2009.

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- ⁷ Search results for keyword 'church' description 'art deco', searching all source heritage lists, Australian Heritage Places Inventory <http://www.heritage.gov.au/ahpi/index.html>; Heritage Walk Morpeth brochure <http://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/UserFiles/File/Morpeth%20Heritage%20Walk%20Brochure.pdf>
All accessed 7 March 2011
- ⁸ http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail_places;2382 accessed 7 March 2011
- ⁹ http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail_places;1279 accessed 7 March 2011
- ¹⁰ <http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/heritageregister> accessed 7 March 2011
- ¹¹ <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/chims/basicSearch.html?actionType=showadvanced&searchType=A>
accessed 7 March 2011
- ¹² The ACT Heritage Register cannot be searched by keywords, place names, place type or architectural style. The Tasmanian and South Australian Heritage Registers available online do not include construction dates, building styles or photographs. The New South Wales Heritage database includes this information but is not searchable by keyword, construction date or architectural style.
- ¹³ Emails from: Ester Guerzoni, Heritage Tasmania, 10 March 2011; Deb Moran, Heritage Policy Unit, Department of Environment & Natural Resources - SA Government, 10 March 2011; Dianne Bensley, Environment & Heritage Division Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport, 11 March 2011; on HCWA file P09390.

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research may find more information regarding the life and work of Father Peter Celestine Gusi, and the extent to which his design for the place was modified by architects Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Tracey.

Further research may clarify whether similar places exist elsewhere in Australia.

The statement in the conservation plan (p.10) that the New Norcia community intended to build a monastery at Southern Cross has not been able to be substantiated by further research. It is possible that the Benedictines acquired land intending to establish a mission farm, such as that at Wyening, but it appears unlikely that the land was intended to be used for a second monastery.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, sited across Altair Street from *Our Lady of Montserrat, Southern Cross* has not been included in this assessment. Although it is part of the Catholic history of Southern Cross it does not share the values identified as significant in relation to the church. Its strong associations are with the Sisters who founded and ran it, initially the Presentation Sisters and then, for most of its history, the Josephite Sisters, while the church itself has strong links with the Benedictine tradition and community at New Norcia, and the Spanish cultural ties that this brought. The school is a modest timber building of domestic scale and vernacular architectural style, largely hidden by verge trees, and does not contribute to the landmark presence of the church. It is not known whether any of the early buildings remain at the school. Further research may identify additional information relating to the school that may contribute to it being heritage assessed either in its own right or in relation to the church.