

SPENCER HOTEL

C20 21

Place Name and Address: Spencer Hotel
5 Forsyth Street
Whyalla SA 5600

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUE:

Description:

The building is a two storey stone building rendered in cement stucco in Moderne style with some Art Deco detailing. It occupies a prominent site in the centre of Whyalla on the major intersection of Forsyth Street and Darling Terrace. Its facades feature bas-relief mural panels depicting the Whyalla steelworks and shipyard.

Statement of Heritage Value:

The Spencer Hotel is significant both as a major building from the development of Whyalla during the industrial expansion brought on by the Second World War, and as an interesting and rare example of the early buildings of the Moderne movement in South Australia.

Relevant Criteria (Under Section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*):

- (a) It demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history as an exemplar of the public facilities necessary for the industrial development of wartime Whyalla
 - (d) It is an outstanding representative of a particular class of places of cultural significance, early Modern buildings in South Australia
 - (e) It demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment in its early application of Modern design principles and Art Deco ornament to a hotel building
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RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Spencer Hotel be provisionally entered in the South Australian Heritage Register.

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE:

(a) It demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history

War industry boosted the population of Whyalla from a few hundred to 7,500 between 1938 and 1945. The lives of many workers in the middle of a war were not made easier by the fact that Whyalla was a raw and primitive settlement on the edge of the desert. To alleviate the situation, BHP and the State government cooperated to supply community facilities and rental housing in order to make living conditions as attractive as possible. While the rest of the country was starved of construction materials, Whyalla had a building boom. The rendered stone Hotel Spencer and brick Bay View Hotel went up in the main street between 1939 and 1941, while the sandstone Savings Bank and Whyalla Hospital were built in 1940. In 1943 the Court House and Whyalla Technical High School both opened. All were attractive and stylish buildings, the two hotels and the Court House fine examples of the Art Deco style. (Stanley 2004, pp. 137-139)

The Spencer Hotel was the second one built in the rapidly growing town. It opened on 20 November 1939. In a breakaway architectural style for a new hotel in South Australia, it was designed in an early Modern design by C.A. Fisher of Adelaide (architects Russell & Yelland are also associated with the design) and built by the Frickers company. Its owners were the partnership of publicans William Byrnes and Dennis O'Leary of the Halfway Hotel on Port Road at Beverley. The £20,000 hotel was described as the most modern in the state when it was completed in August 1939, just one month before the outbreak of the Second World War.

(d) It is an outstanding representative of a particular class of places of cultural significance as an early Modern building in South Australia

It might seem surprising that new design movements would flourish in a place so out of the way as Whyalla. But in fact, the developing town of Whyalla was an ideal environment in which to design in modern styles. There was little pre-existing built context to conform to, and local people were receptive to new design trends; after all, they were living in an environment where everything was new. And they had access to building materials, which were generally unavailable after 1940. Such was the pace of construction in wartime Whyalla that the two Art Deco hotels were both completed and trading over two years before the completion of those better-known early Modern buildings in Adelaide, the Bank of New South Wales and Deep Acres Apartments.

The plans for the Spencer Hotel were drawn by C.A. Fisher in conjunction with Caradoc, Ashton and Fisher. Plans dated October 1938 and February 1939 are held in the Louis Laybourne Smith Architecture Museum, the second one presumably the contract drawing. These are not names otherwise associated with the early Modern movement, suggesting the unparalleled opportunity offered by commissions in wartime Whyalla.

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(e) It demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment as an exemplar of the Modern style

The Spencer Hotel is an early example of modernist styling, with muted Art Deco detailing. Built with foundations to take an additional storey if required, the Spencer Hotel was of local stone and finished externally in cement stucco. It comprised 26 bedrooms and had an 80 foot brick bar, lined with ceramic tiles. (*Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*, September 1939, p7) Relief in the austere rendering was made by pressed cement frescoes that were symbolic of different phases of the steel industry in Whyalla.

The fresco work was constructed by Willment & Ingham Ltd. A similar motif was adopted with the sandblasting of the glass windows of the bar and saloon. Cantilever awnings were installed on two streets with Wunderlich metal fascia and ceilings. Almost the whole of the street facades from the pavement to the underside of the awning were lined with ceramic tiles. In finishing off the details of the building, metal ribbon lettering forms the name of the hotel. (*Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*, September 1939, p7) The bas-relief mural panels, cantilever awnings with Wunderlich metal fascia and ceilings and the ceramic tiles of the two street facades have survived intact to the present.

Few hotels were built in the Art Deco style, but there was quite a trend in the 1920s whereby owners of existing hotels and other buildings in South Australia, wishing to create these styles, gave them austere renders in an effort to disguise original ornate Victorian Italianate structures. This trend continued by providing buff coloured renders that lent themselves to the new Modern styles of austerity whereby minimal colour and detail were etched into the often horizontal detailing.

REFERENCES:

BHP Review, June 1944

Danvers Architects, *Heritage of the Eyre Peninsula and Far West Coast*, 1987

Bob Hoad, *Hotels and Publicans in South Australia*, 1986 & 1999

Licensed Victuallers' Gazette, September 1939, p7

Peter Stanley, *Whyalla at War*, 2004

Photographs at Whyalla National Trust Museum

Patricia Sumerling 'Whyalla's Watering Holes', 2005

Plans in Louis Laybourne Smith Architecture Museum S89/111/1-11

SITE RECORD:

FORMER NAME: n/a

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: Two storey masonry building in Modern style with Art Deco detailing, in a prominent site on a major intersection

DATE OF COMPLETION: 1939

REGISTER STATUS: **Description:** n/a

CURRENT USE: **Description:** Hotel
Dates: 1940-2007

PREVIOUS USE(S): **Description:** n/a
Dates: n/a

ARCHITECT: **Name:** C.A. Fisher
Dates: 1938

BUILDER: **Name:** Frickers
Dates: 1939

SUBJECT INDEXING: **Group:** Hotels etc
Category: Hotel

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: **Description:** City of Whyalla

LOCATION: **Unit No.:** -
Street No.: 5
Street Name: Forsyth Street
Town/Suburb: Whyalla
Post Code: 5600
Region No.: 12
Region: Eyre Peninsula

LAND DESCRIPTION: **Title Type:** CT
Volume: 5228
Folio: 854 & 855
Lot No.: T 560501 A240 & A241
Section: -
Hundred: Randell

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SITE RECORD (Cont.):

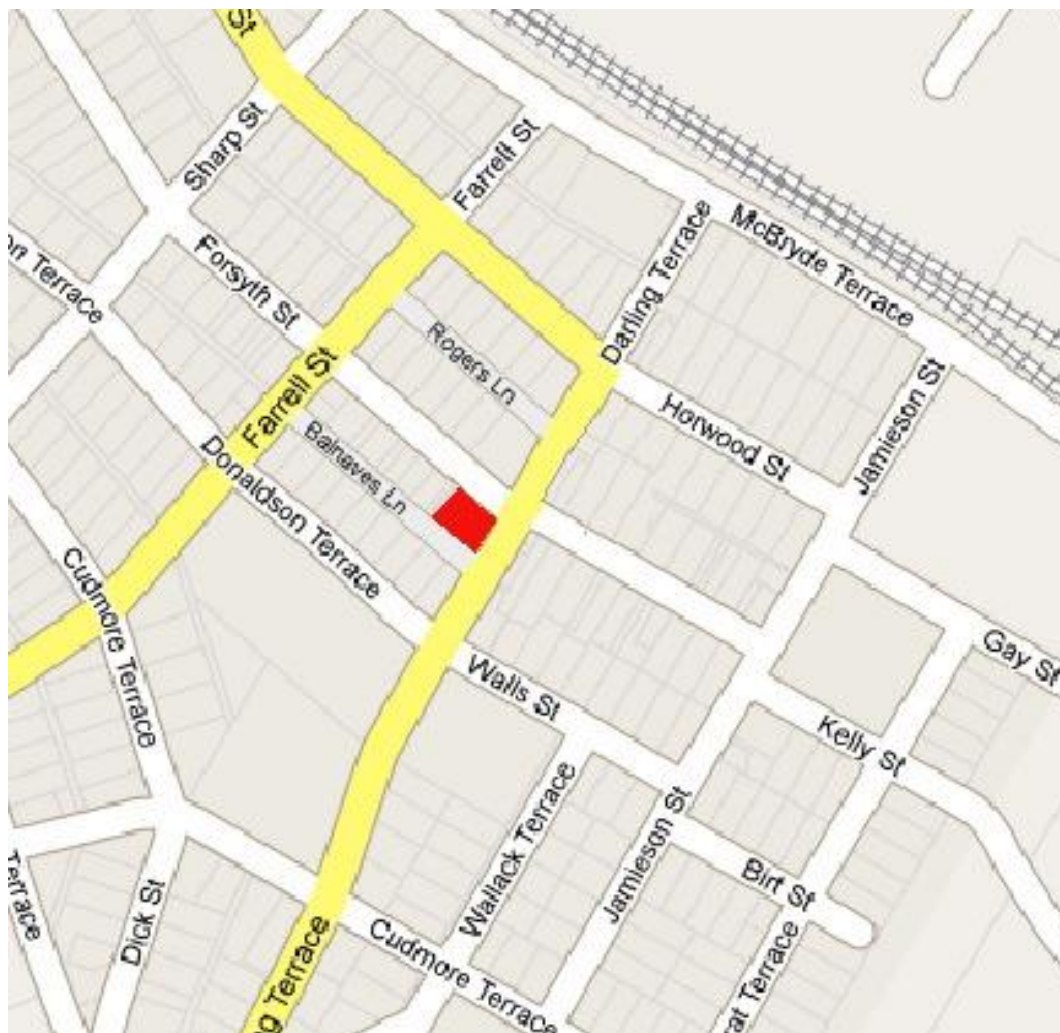
AMG REFERENCE:

Zone: 53
Easting: 0741407
Northing: 6341953
Map Sheet: 6431 Whyalla
Map Scale: 1:100,000

OWNER:

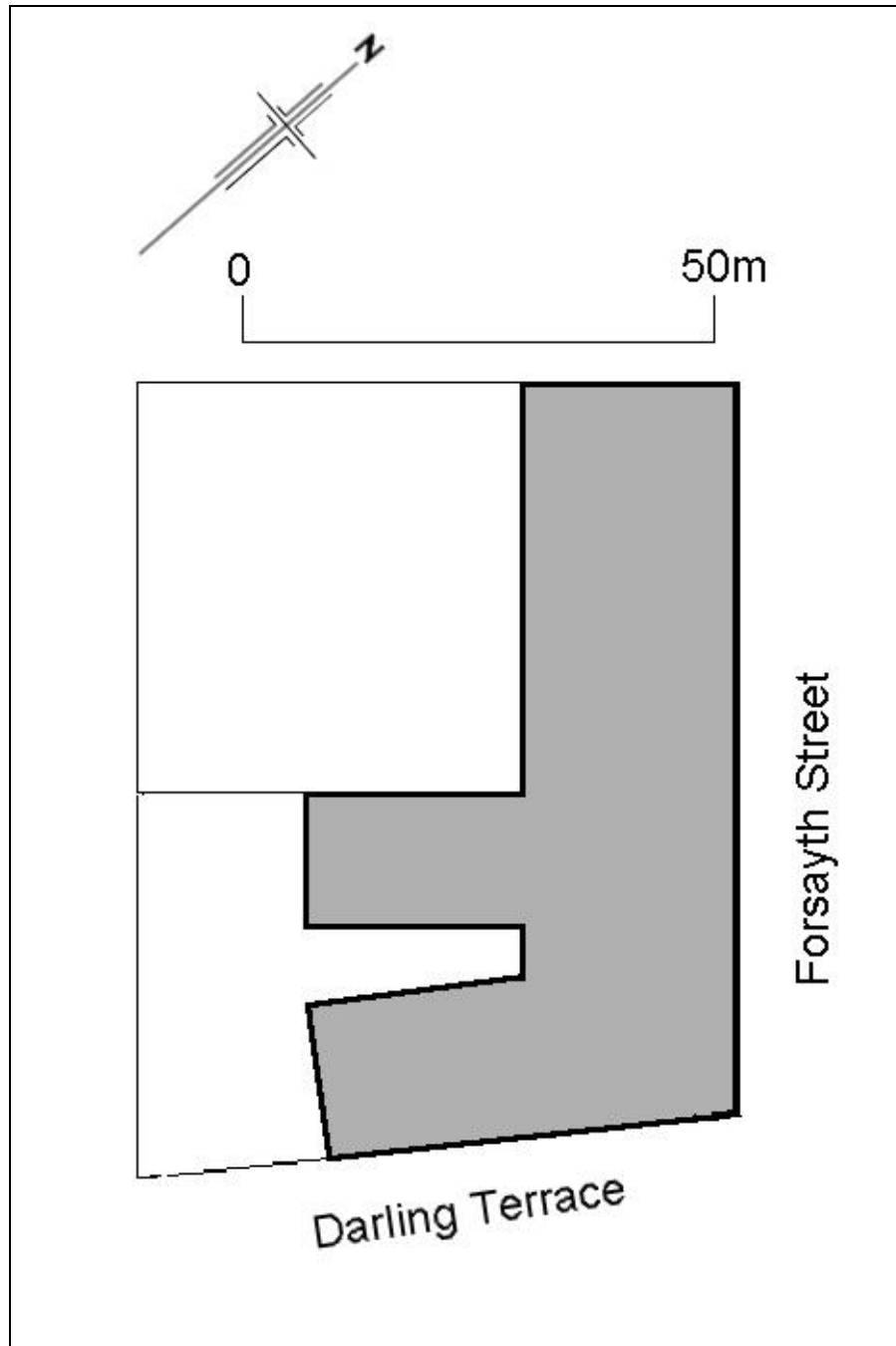
Name: Chloe Bay Pty Ltd
Address: 540 Port Road
Town/Suburb: Allenby Gardens
Post Code: 5009

Location Map



Location of Spencer Hotel

Site Plan



Plan of Spencer Hotel



Spencer Hotel from intersection of Forsyth Street and Darling Terrace



Spencer Hotel, looking down Forsyth Street to Bay View Hotel

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Spencer Hotel from Forsyth Street, showing Modern detail



Detail of murals on facade of Spencer Hotel