

Blue Mountains Heritage Register Review

Heritage Inventory - 2016 Heritage Review

SHI Number

1170045

Study Number

WF029

Item Name: **Coorah and interiors**

Location: **221-271 Great Western Highway, Wentworth Falls [Blue M**

Address: 221-271 Great Western Highway

DUAP Region: Sydney West

Suburb / Nearest Town: Wentworth Falls 2782

Historic region: Sydney

Local Govt Area: Blue Mountains

Parish:

State: NSW

County:

Other/Formal Names: Blue Mountains Grammar School; Pitt House

Area/Group/Complex:

Group ID:

Aboriginal Area:

Curtilage/Boundary:

Item Type:

Group:

Category:

Owner: Private - Corporate

Admin Codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current Use: Private School

Former Uses: Country Retreat; Children's Home

Assessed Significance: **Local**

Endorsed Significance:

Statement of Significance: Coorah has very high local significance as the country retreat for half a century of Robert Matcham Pitt, the head of one of the great stock and station agencies in the state, who was also a notable local figure, patron with his wife of the School of Arts and a pioneer of daffodil-growing in the area. As a major private school for the last fifty years, Coorah has also high local significance, although there has been a price to pay in the redevelopment of the estate.

Historical Notes or Provenance: Mary Pitt and her four children came to the colony in 1801 after the death of her husband, a relative of Lord Nelson. Mary's only son, Thomas, settled at North Richmond, married and had three sons. One of these three sons, George Matcham Pitt (1814 - 1896), established a stock and station agency in the 1860s and built this up into the major firm of Pitt, Son and Badgery Ltd over the next three decades (Walsh V 446-7).

George Matcham Pitt received a grant of 16 hectares (40 acres) in Wentworth Falls in 1882, encouraged by his surveyor son, George jr., and John McLaughlin who had established Tarella there around the same time. (Edwards and Burge 9-11)

In 1888 George Pitt sr. gave the still undeveloped land at Wentworth Falls to his son Robert (the Son in the stock and station company). Robert Matcham Pitt then built Coorah in 1889 and cleared and ploughed an adjacent paddock to establish an orchard and garden with ornamental trees, laid out by the Minnett family (one of whom, Michael, was later at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney and head gardener at Admiralty House) (Edwards and Burge 11, 17-19).

The house name Coorah came from the original grazing property of nearly 30 000 hectares

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in the Gwydir district of northern New South Wales, acquired by George Pitt sr in 1848 (Walsh V 447).

Robert Matcham Pitt, his wife Marie and their eight children occupied Coorah intermittently as a mountain retreat from 1890 onwards until 1935. As with other substantial country retreats, there was a permanent caretaker: for the central part of the Pitt period this was Arnold Gorringe, who tended the grounds and water supply, while his wife Mary was housekeeper from 1905 until 1919. (Edwards and Burge 21,45, 75-6)

The Pitts did significant entertaining at Coorah, scoring their biggest social success by entertaining Melba in 1911 at the time Robert Pitt was involved in the spectacular season of grand opera mounted by J.C. Williamson and Melba. The other stars of this remarkable season, John McCormack, Amelita Gallicurci and Enrico Caruso also visited Coorah in 1911 and Melba, at least, performed in the drawing room. The stage at the Theatre Royal in Sydney was showered with Coorah daffodils every time Melba sang there. (Edwards and Burge 23-4)

Robert Pitt had pioneered daffodil-growing on a large scale at Coorah, experimenting with many different varieties. From 1905 onwards there was a Daffodil Fair in Wentworth Falls, dominated by blooms from the Pitts' garden.

From the 1920s onwards, Robert and Marie Pitt spent less time at Coorah and their children do not seem to have warmed to the property. In 1934 Robert gave the 17 hectare (42 acre) estate to the Country Women's Association, with a provision in his will (he died in 1935) that it should be used as a home for children. He chose the CWA because its founder, Grace Munro, was the wife of a colleague and friend who was on the board of Pitt, Son and Badgery. (Edwards and Burge 28,31)

The CWA did not carry out the terms of the will very vigorously and in 1938 passed the property to the Union Trustee Co. In 1939 Coorah was acquired by the Bush Church Aid Society of Australia, an Anglican body associated with country hospitals and children's hostels. The BCAS had established hostels at Wilcannia in 1920 and at Mungindi in 1930: now in 1939 a third was added at Wentworth Falls, opening in April 1940.

In 1951, however, the Bush Church Aid Society decided to concentrate on Mungindi and its work at Broken Hill. The Society had already sub-divided the land at Coorah, selling off some 15 hectares (37 acres) in 1949. Now in 1951 the house with its surviving curtilage of 2 hectares (some 5 acres) was sold to the MacLaurin School at Leura and soon after transferred to the Council of [Anglican] Diocesan Church Schools. (Edwards and Burge 39-42)

The MacLaurin School came to an agreement with the Deanes' Blue Mountains Grammar School at Springwood to combine resources at Coorah, under the name Blue Mountains Church of England Grammar School for Boys. The move took place in 1951 and Coorah house was renamed Pitt House. The school repurchased part of the original Matcham Pitt estate. The MacLaurin family, deeply involved with the University of Sydney, presented the gates originally at the City Road entrance to the University, but later at the MacLaurins' Mamre estate at St Marys. These gates were re-erected at the Great Western Highway

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entrance to the school in memory of Archbishop Mowll.

New buildings were progressively erected around Pitt House, the Matcham Pitt out-buildings were largely demolished and the garden was much changed. The school became coeducational in 1974. Coorah house itself is now the school administrative offices. (Edwards and Burge 39-41,86-94)

Themes:	National Theme	State Theme	Local Theme
	3. Economy	Pastoralism	(none)
	6. Educating	Education	(none)
	8. Culture	Leisure	(none)
	9. Phases of Life	Persons	(none)

Designer:

Maker / Builder:

Year Started:

Year Completed:

Circa: No

Physical Description: Single storey symmetrical verandahed house facing east, located on raised embankment, with M form hipped roof with encircling bullnosed verandah terminated by projecting gables at west end.
2 2 storey rear wings on west side are symmetrical to front (east) wing form a courtyard enclosed with a hipped corrugated steel roof with central roof lantern with pyramidal corrugated steel roof.
Slate roofs with lead flashings. Boxed eaves
Rendered chimneys with moulded corbels. Cows to chimneys on front (east) wing, terracotta pots to rear wings
Bullnosed verandah with corrugated steel roof around front and sides of single storey wing with cast iron columns and paneled cast iron frieze.
Central entry on east side marked by bullnosed gabled breakfront to verandah approached by stone stairs in grass embankment.
Face brick walls, English bond under verandah, stretcher bond to rear wings.
3 bay front (east) elevation with central entry door with leadlight sidelights and fanlight flanked by french doors with arched top panels, toplights and three paneled timber shutters.
Side (north and south) elevations of front (east) wing with large double hung windows
Rear wings with 3 no. gabled dormers on each external elevation. Dormers have pointed arched double hung windows
Gables have simple fretwork barge boards and turned timber finials
Gables in east wing have pointed arch timber vents.

House is approached by curved drive lined with mature plantings
Substantial mature plantings to south of house

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Item Name: **Coorah and interiors**

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Surviving daffodils in garden beds on east side of house

Physical Condition:

Modification Dates:

Recommended Management: Lapsed item under LEP 1991, now zoned LEP 2005 and included in LEP 2005 Heritage Schedule. Remove from LEP 1991 Heritage Schedule- 1991 Heritage Review. Superseded by inclusion in LEP 2015.

Management:

Further Comments:

Criteria a) Coorah has very high local significance as the country retreat for half a century of Robert Matcham Pitt, the head of one of the great stock and station agencies in the state, who was also a notable local figure, patron with his wife of the School of Arts and a pioneer of daffodil-growing in the area. As a major private school for the last fifty years, Coorah has also high local significance, although there has been a price to pay in the redevelopment of the estate.

Criteria b)

Criteria c)

Criteria d)

Criteria e)

Criteria f)

Criteria g)

Integrity / Intactness:

References:	Author	Title	Year
	Edwards, Joan, and Burge, Michael	Coorah, The Life of Pitt House: A Centenary History, 1889-1989	1989
	Walsh, G. P.	Pitt, George Matcham (1814-1896), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume V.	1974

Studies:	Author	Title	Number	Year
	Blue Mountains City Council	Technical Audit BM Heritage Register	WF029	2008
	Jack, R. I. for University of Sydney	Blue Mountains Heritage Register Review	WF029	1999
	Tropman and Tropman	Heritage Study Review, Blue Mountains	WF029	1992
	Croft & Associates Pty Ltd & Meredith Walker	Blue Mountains Heritage Study	WF029	1983
	Blue Mountains City Council	LEP 2015 Heritage Review		2016
	Heritage Advisor	Technical Review		2010

Parcels:

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Location: **221-271 Great Western Highway, Wentworth Falls [Blue M**

Latitude:

Longitude:

Location validity:

Spatial Accuracy:

Map Name:

Map Scale:

AMG Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

Listings:	Name:	Title:	Number:	Date:
	Local Environmental Plan	LEP 2015	WF029	21/12/2015
	Local Environmental Plan	LEP2005	WF029	7/10/2005
	Local Environmental Plan - Lapsed	LEP1991	WF029	27/12/1991
	Heritage study		WF029	

Local Instrument: LEP 2015

Local Identifier: WF029

Draft Instrument: Proposed deleted item in LEP 1991 Heritage Schedule- Lapsed under LEP 1991, now in LEP 2005 Schedule. Superseded by inclusion in LEP 2015.

Technical Comment:

Update Notes: (i) Heritage Review 2016 - name changed from Blue Mountains Grammar School to Coorah, interiors added, Aboriginal statement added (SR/Oct2016)

Aboriginal Heritage: The Blue Mountains Local Government Area is within the Country of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples and Blue Mountains City Council respects their cultural heritage and deep ongoing connection to this Country.
This inventory sheet documents the European occupation of the site only, and the heritage significance of the place in this context (assessed against the heritage criteria set by the NSW Heritage Council).
This does not therefore, represent a complete history of the place, or represent the perspectives of Darug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners in relation to the colonial impacts on this site. Consultation with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal stakeholders is required, before Aboriginal Cultural Heritage that may be associated with this place, can be recorded.

Data Entry: Date First Entered: 29/09/1999

Date Updated: 01/11/2016

Status: Partial

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Image:



Caption: Blue Mountains Grammar School

Copyright:

Image by:

Image Date: 12/09/2000

Image Number: 1170045b01

Image Path:

Image File: 1170045b01.jpg

Thumb Nail Path:

Thumb Nail File:

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Image:



Caption: Blue Mountains Grammar School

Copyright:

Image by:

Image Date: 12/09/2000

Image Number: 1170045b02

Image Path:

Image File: 1170045b02.jpg

Thumb Nail Path:

Thumb Nail File: