HO112 – Commercial Hotel, 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee

Heritage Place: Commercial Hotel	**HO Reference:** HO112 **Date updated:** 15 October 2026
Address: 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee	



Figure 1. The Commercial Hotel at 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

Item Group: Commercial **Item Type:** Inn/Tavern	**Key Theme:** Building connections through transport and communication; servicing the community; culture and creative life **Key Sub-theme:** early tracks and travel routes; entertainment and leisure activities; tourism
Designer: Unknown **Builder:** Unknown	**Date of Construction:** c.1860-70 (corner section), 1930s (matching eastern wing), 1970-90 (contemporary additions). **Style:** Federation Free-Style
Significance Level: Local	
Recommendation: Retain solar energy controls. Apply external paint controls.	

Controls:	●	External paint controls	○	Internal alteration controls	○	Tree controls
	○	Included on Victorian Heritage Register	○	Incorporated Plans	○	Outbuildings and fence not exempt
	○	Prohibited uses may be permitted	○	Aboriginal Heritage Place	●	Solar energy system controls

Curtilage



Figure 2. Aerial map showing the curtilage boundary of the Commercial Hotel at 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee. Basemap source: Nearmap. 2025. Spatial data source: VicMap & Department of Transport and Planning.

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Commercial Hotel is of historical significance as a longstanding hotel that illustrates the development of social life, hospitality, and community gathering places in the municipality. The site of the Commercial Hotel was originally the premises of the Railway Hotel under the ownership of Richard O'Connor, offering accommodation for travellers passing through the township of Werribee from at least the 1870s, which demonstrated the commencement of tourism within the City of Wyndham. The Hotel was later adapted and renamed the Anglers' Hotel to attract those visiting the Werribee River, being demolished and rebuilt in 1903 to provide additional accommodation for anglers furthering the connections with the establishment of tourism in the district. The renaming of the hotel over the course of its history demonstrates the development of the township from a small stop on a major road to a key aspect of community life over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The proximity of the Commercial Hotel to the Geelong-Melbourne Railway line also demonstrates the colonial replacement of traditional Bunurong travel routes which contributed to the displacement of Aboriginal people during this period.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	The Commercial Hotel is of local significance as a representative example of a Federation era hotel. The original form and corner presentation of the hotel including a chamfered corner form with a curvilinear corner parapet; and rendered decorative sill skirting to the upper

		windows of the hotel contribute to the significance of the place.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	The place does not meet this criterion.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	The place does not meet this criterion.
G	*Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	The place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	The Commercial Hotel is of significance to the O'Connor family and specifically Richard O'Connor, who after operating a hotel on the site for over 30 years, commissioned the Federation era hotel to provide accommodation for those visiting Werribee and specifically anglers, rebranding as the 'Anglers' Hotel'.

Statement of Significance - Commercial Hotel, 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee

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Figure 3. The Commercial Hotel at 101-111 Watton Street, Werribee. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

What is significant?

The original corner section of the Commercial Hotel built c. 1860s, as well as 1930s additions are significant. Specifically, the overall form, scale and siting. The corner and all ground level openings, paintworks and verandah bricked infill to Watton Street are later alterations and do not contribute to the significance of the place. All new contemporary single storey additions to the east and rear built c.1970s are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Commercial Hotel is of historical, representative and associative significance to the City of Wyndham.

Why is it significant?

The Commercial Hotel is of historical significance as a longstanding hotel that illustrates the development of social life, hospitality, and community gathering places in the municipality. The site of the Commercial Hotel was originally the premises of the Railway Hotel under the ownership of Richard O'Connor, offering accommodation for travellers passing through the township of Werribee from at least the 1870s, which demonstrated the commencement of tourism within the City of Wyndham. The Hotel was later adapted and renamed the Anglers' Hotel to attract those visiting the Werribee River, being demolished and rebuilt in 1903 to

provide additional accommodation for anglers furthering the connections with the establishment of tourism in the district. The renaming of the hotel over the course of its history demonstrates the development of the township from a small stop on a major road to a key aspect of community life over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Criterion A).

The proximity of the Commercial Hotel to the Geelong-Melbourne Railway line also demonstrates the colonial replacement of traditional Bunurong travel routes which contributed to the displacement of Aboriginal people during this period.(Criterion A).

The Commercial Hotel is of local significance as a representative example of a Federation era hotel. The original form and corner presentation of the hotel including a chamfered corner form with a curvilinear corner parapet; and rendered decorative sill skirting to the upper windows of the hotel contribute to the significance of the place. (Criterion D).

The Commercial Hotel is of significance to the O'Connor family and specifically Richard O'Connor, who after operating a hotel on the site for over 30 years, commissioned the Federation era hotel to provide accommodation for those visiting Werribee and specifically anglers, rebranding as the Anglers' Hotel'. (Criterion H).

Source:

Commercial Hotel citation, Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2026.

Description

Bunurong Country

The Commercial Hotel is situated on the lands of the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of Country. Despite the effects of colonisation, including dispossession of land, the Traditional Custodians have maintained a continuing connection to land, waters and culture within the City of Wyndham.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Bunurong peoples had easy access to significant and diverse resources by following well-worn routes along coastlines, watercourses and elevated landforms to their camping places. These regular routes through Country were also used by Bunurong peoples to fulfil their various social, political and religious obligations (BLCAC 2026, 15).

The proximity of the Commercial Hotel to the Geelong-Melbourne Railway Line exemplifies the colonial replacement of traditional Bunurong routes with new routes that prioritised straight-line distance over all other factors. These new routes were guided by economic expediency and facilitated further colonial development, as well as the displacement of Aboriginal peoples. (BLCAC, 2026, 15).

Physical Analysis

The Commercial Hotel at 101-111 Watton Street, consists of a two-storey painted face brick Federation Free Style hotel with surrounding single storey contemporary additions. The building occupies a large allotment with the early taller sections of the Commercial Hotel located to the western corner of the site, fronting the intersection of Watton Street and Bridge Street. The hotel presents no setback to the footpath along its front northern elevation and side western elevation.

The early 1904 section includes a two storey chamfered corner form (typical of Victorian hotels) with a curvilinear corner parapet; the distinctive shaping is reflected in the rendered decorative sill skirting to the upper windows of the hotel. The adjoining 1930s section to the northeast, fronting Watton Street, has been designed to match the original corner form and architectural expression. The 1904 and 1930s parts are now indistinguishable and visually read as a cohesive building. The north and west elevations include varied fenestration of single and wide stilted arched windows as well as squared windows to the lower western elevation. Further details include façade banding and inconsistent parapet bracketing, concealed low hipped roofs in corrugated sheet metal and corbelled face brick chimneys. The central section facing Watton Street, formerly the Victorian terrace, is articulated by a later tiled angled parapet.

The site has contemporary c.1970s additions to the northeast and southeast (rear). The new works are single storey and adjoin the two storey building form, matching the ground level scale, face brick materiality and external paint colour. The later works are distinguished by contemporary detailing and features; the addition facing Watton street includes large, squared windows to the façade, a simplistic partially enclosed metal framed verandah with a suspended sign, and a terracotta tiled sloping parapet. The southern addition is of a rectilinear form with a flat skillion roof, large, squared windows and doors.

As of 2025, the Commercial Hotel continues to be occupied as a commercial food and beverage business, with the contemporary eastern addition also housing a drive through liquor store. The rear of the block is occupied by a large, asphalted carpark and thoroughfare.

The building has had extensive external renovations to the early sections of the hotel, whereby the original central terrace and verandah arrangement facing Watton Street has been enclosed, and all lower fenestration and openings are altered. Only the corner form and parapet are clearly distinguishable as original features of the earlier hotel.

Alterations and Additions

- Additional c.1920s two storey wing to the east of the original building [see Figure 5 & 6]
- The central Victorian verandah to Watton Street is now enclosed and bricked. The façade now includes imitation windows to match the original stilted arch fenestration and sill detailing. A terracotta tiled parapet roof facing Watton Street is also a contemporary alteration to this section.*
- All openings to the ground level have been altered including:
  - Alterations to original windows and doorways of the western elevation to contemporary windows;*
  - Alterations of the corner doorway to a window; *
  - Alterations of the large adjacent corner window to the northern elevation revised to an entryway;* and
  - All new fenestration to the lower northern façade.*
- Face brick finish overpainted, including the painting of all significant sections*
- Hard scaping including rear asphalted carparking elements and vehicular egress from Watton Street is not original.
- External piping, lighting, signage on the façade of the building is not original*

The Commercial Hotel is in good condition and is of moderate integrity.

**** Denotes element that does not contribute to the cultural significance of the place.***

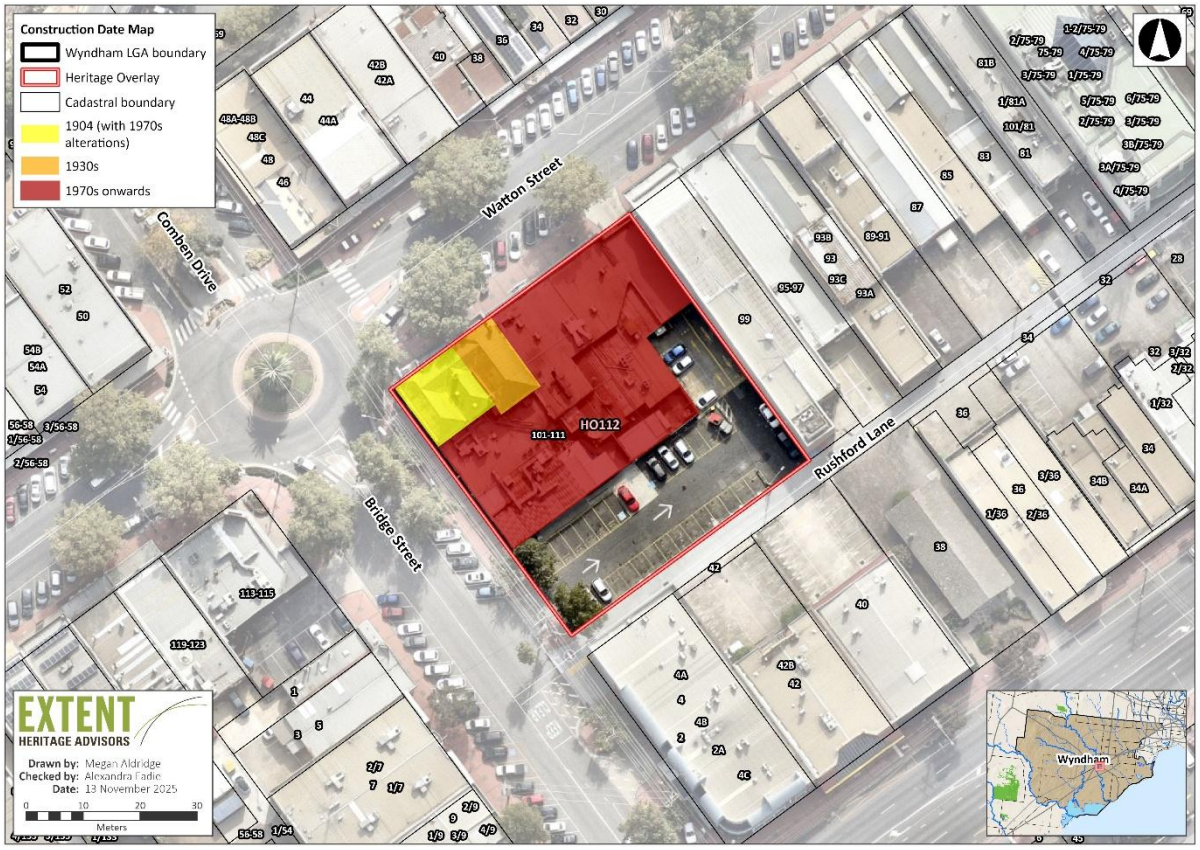


Figure 4. Construction date map of the Commercial Hotel. *Basemap source:* Nearmap. 2025. *Spatial data source:* VicMap & Department of Transport and Planning.

History

The Commercial Hotel is situated on the lands of the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of Country. Despite the effects of colonisation, including dispossession of land, the Traditional Custodians have maintained a continuing connection to land, waters and culture within the City of Wyndham.

Between 2.5–4.5 million years ago, lava flows created the Werribee Plain, carving out a new landscape of meandering waterways and vast grasslands that would support diverse ecosystems (Presland 2005, 157-159; Presland 2008, 37). At the time of colonisation, the Yalukit Willam clan of the Bunurong peoples occupied the land between the Werribee River and St Kilda (Clark 1990, 363; Presland 2010, 16). Prior to settlement, Bunurong peoples had easy access to significant and diverse resources by following well-worn routes along coastlines, watercourse and elevated landforms to their camping places. These regular routes through Country were also used by Bunurong peoples to fulfill their various social, political and religious observations (BLAC 2026, 15).

From 1835, the volcanic plains north and west of the fledgling city of Melbourne were the first to be taken up by squatter pastoralists, as the landscape of open grassy plains and light vegetation provided favourable conditions for movement of livestock over land (Vines 1993, 9; Broome 1984, 23). This rapid domination by squatters commenced the forced dislocation of First Nations peoples from their traditional lands.

Place History

Colonial settlements within the Wyndham area initially developed as stopping points along the early tracks between Geelong and Melbourne. Werribee River was a suitable place to rest and water horses, and thus an appropriate location for the settlement of Werribee and the development of transport infrastructure and hotels for travellers (Lovell Chen 2023, 51).

The establishment of colonial settlements and infrastructure fundamentally altered the landscape of Bunurong Country, impeding access to and use of traditional trade and travel routes. The proximity of the Commercial Hotel and its earlier iterations to the Geelong-Melbourne Railway Line is representative of the colonial practice of formalising existing Traditional Owner routes that prioritised straight-line distances and proximity to water sources. The formalisation of existing routes was guided by economic expediency and facilitated further colonial development, as well as the displacement of Traditional Owners (BLCAC 2026, 15).

Railway Hotel, construction date unknown

The land on which the Commercial Hotel now stands was previously an earlier hotel known as the Railway Hotel, however its construction date is unknown. Richard O'Connor, a colonist from Meath, Ireland, was noted as operating the Railway Hotel – also known as 'O'Connor's Railway Hotel' - from the late 1870s (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1878, 3). The name appears to have been adopted from an earlier Railway Hotel, of no connection, which existed in 1863 further west within Block 8 of the Wyndham Township Reserve (Geological Survey of Victoria). In 1883, O'Connor's Railway Hotel was recognised as one of only three hotels within Werribee township area (Leader 1883, 30), The business was advertised as containing eight rooms exclusive of those required for the use of the family (Williamstown Advertiser 1886, 3).

Anglers' Hotel, 1893

By 1890, Werribee River had gained popularity as a fishing spot, bringing new visitors to the area. The rise in passenger traffic at the Werribee Railway Station demanded an increase in suitable accommodation. In 1893, Richard O'Connor made an application to alter the name of the hotel from the Railway Hotel to the Anglers' Hotel. The change was made so that future fishing parties would know their favourite resort by its new name (Williamstown Chronicle 1893, 2). In 1904, it was publicised that Richard O'Connor intended to rebuild the Anglers' Hotel, with a news article noting that "Mr O'Connor purposes erecting a two storey brick building, replete with every convenience, and those who know this sterling gentleman, and old resident, look forward to seeing of the most up-to-date hotels in the whole of Australia'' (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1904, 3).

The design of the building involved a unique Federation Free-Style design which incorporated a chamfered corner with a domestic Victorian inspired terrace to the east, facing Watton Street. The building was composed of polychromatic Lombardic brickwork with thick contrasting banding around window lintels. The hotel corner entrance was emphasised by the pale brick quoining, large arched windows, painted signage, and a distinctive curvilinear parapet. The terrace was traditionally articulated in a Victorian domestic style. featuring a bullnosed verandah with intricate iron lacework to the balustrading, frieze, fringe and corner brackets, as well as an end wall with capping detail (Figure 5). The hotel was a striking structure in both design and scale within the early Watton streetscape, as it was then primarily comprised of low single storey buildings (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Photograph of the premises as Gargan's Commercial Hotel, as seen from the corner of Watton & Bridge Street (then Werribee Street), c1920s. *Source: Field, Dick.* n.d. *Gargans Commercial Hotel.* Facebook: Lost Werribee (website). https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2446923742295553&set=p.2446923742295553&type=3



Figure 6. c.1920s photograph, looking east down Watton Street from the intersection with Bridge Street. The Gargan's Commercial Hotel to the right of frame. *Source:* Werribee District Historical Society. c.1920s. *Watton Street.* Digitised photograph. Werribee District Historical Society.

Commercial Hotel, early 1900s

The name change to the Commercial Hotel likely coincided with a change in proprietor in the early 1900s, with the Commercial Hotel noted in the Transfer of License from O'Connor to his daughter Johanna Cooke in 1907 (Geelong Advertiser 1907, 2). The hotel eventually came into the possession of Joseph Lawrence Gargan in 1920, with the hotel rebranded as Gargan's Commercial Hotel, the name being advertised across the building's facades and parapet (Figure 5). A 1920 description of the hotel survives in the sale notice for the O'Connor Estate following a subdivision in that year. It was announced that the hotel, shops and houses were for sale in "the main business street of the township and close to the Railway Station" (The Age, 1920, 11). In 1997, the Commercial Hotel was described as:

> "a Two-storey Brick Building with Balcony, overlooking the Werribee River; it contains 22 Rooms. There is also good Stabling, Loose Boxes, Feed-house, Sheds, and all necessary hotel conveniences. Electric light and water are laid on, also very large underground tank. the whole of the Buildings, both inside and out, are in splendid condition" (Context 1997, 380).



Figure 7. Extract from c.1930-40s aerial photograph of Werribee. The image shows the Commercial Hotel, indicated with red arrow, with the new eastern wing creating a somewhat symmetrical front elevation arrangement. *Source:* Pratt, Charles Daniel. C1930-1940. *Residential area in unidentified location, possibly Werribee, Victoria.* Digitised Photograph. State Library of Victoria (website).

The hotel underwent a number of further alterations and additions in the late twentieth century, with a matching Federation Free style eastern wing added in the 1930s (Figure 7). as well as the enclosing of the terrace as a central bay (Figure 8). In the 1960's-70s, the verandah was permanently enclosed with brickwork; this section remains partially articulated by the contrasting tiled parapet (Figure 9). Further alterations included the infill of the original corner doorway, changes to all ground level fenestration, and overpainting of external brick fabric and window frames. The Commercial Hotel remains in operation as a local hotel.



Figure 8. Photograph of the Commercial Hotel from the intersection of Watton Street and Bridge Street, c.1960-80s. *Source:* Lost Werribee. n.d *Commercial Hotel, corner Bridge Street and Watton Street.* Facebook (website). https://www.facebook.com/LostWerribee/photos/pb.100078842838428.-2207520000/489736947774474/?type=3



Figure 9. Photograph from 2008 of the Commercial Hotel, viewed from the intersection of Watton and Bridge Street, looking southeast. *Source.* Strong, Bill. 2008. *20080720_0425 Commercial Hotel, Werribee.* Flickr (website). https://www.flickr.com/photos/87791108@N00/2687109701/in/dateposted/

Comparative Analysis

The Commercial Hotel is one of a number of hotels within the City of Wyndham developed due to its proximity to major travel routes. It is typical of hotels to undergo remodelling and renaming throughout their history marking changes in travelling routes and ownership. The Commercial Hotel is comparable to the following places:

Little River Hotel (HO56)

The Little River Hotel is historically comparable to the Commercial Hotel as an example of a hotel that has had a continued occupancy since the mid nineteenth-century. The Little River Hotel is notable as a community meeting place associated with the early township of Little River, in a similar way that the Commercial Hotel has been a focal point for the early township of Werribee.

Bridge Hotel (HO113)

The Bridge Hotel is comparable to the Commercial Hotel as an example of a hotel site that has undergone a number of iterations and evolutions including reconstructions and alterations to support the needs of the local community and visitors to Werribee. This includes changes to the name of the hotel. The Bridge Hotel is also demonstrative of a typical architecture style (Federation Free-Style) that is consistent with other hotels of the late nineteenth century across Victoria. When compared to the Bridge Hotel, the Commercial Hotel presents as a stronger example of how commercial buildings, such as hotels, were able to appropriately adapt to suit the needs of the public and tourists.

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Images



Figure 10. Overview of the Commercial Hotel, looking southeast from the intersection of Watton Street and Bridge Street. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 11. North elevation of the Commercial Hotel, looking southeast from Watton Street. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 12. Later addition to the northeast of the Commercial Hotel, looking south from Watton Street. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 13. West elevation of the Commercial Hotel, looking northeast from Bridge Street. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 15. Detail view of the corner chamfer at ground level. Source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

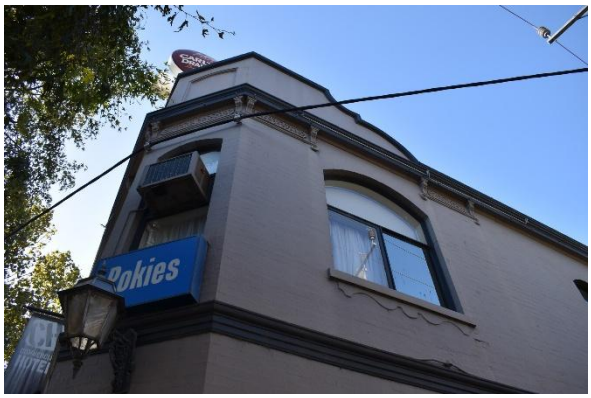


Figure 14. Detail view of the corner chamfer and roof parapet at the upper level. Source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 16. Overview of the west elevation, including later additions to the rear of the early corner hotel. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.



Figure 17. View of the Commercial Hotel looking north from the rear carpark. The image shows later rear additions with the earlier roof forms and chimneys behind. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.