

## Heritage Citation



### Avalon Theatre, University of Queensland

#### Key details

<b>Also known as</b>	St. Lucia Theatre
<b>Addresses</b>	At 172 Sir Fred Schonell Drive, St Lucia, Queensland 4067
<b>Type of place</b>	School, Cinema, Hall, University
<b>Period</b>	Interwar 1919-1939
<b>Style</b>	Art Deco
<b>Lot plan</b>	L2_RP60072; L35_RP23316; L1_RP60072; L36_RP23316
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 July 2005 Date of Citation — February 2011

**Construction**

Roof: Corrugated iron;  
Walls: Timber

**Criterion for listing**

(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (G) Social

The Avalon theatre was constructed as a Sunday School and community hall in 1923. Through its long history it has also hosted church services, served as a movie theatre, and served as University teaching space. In serving these roles it has established a longstanding connection with the St Lucia community. Additionally these changes in purpose reflect changes occurring in the surrounding community, the hall being adapted over time to the needs and wishes of the local residents.

## History

In December 1888 the site on which the Avalon now stands was part of 288 allotments offered for sale by the Land Bank of Queensland as "Hyde Park Toowong." The following year 244 allotments were again offered for sale, indicating that from the initial sale only approximately 44 had sold.

On 19 April 1889 George Murphy purchased two parcels of land. Allotments 36 and 93 on one deed and allotments 35 and 94-97 on the other. These totalled just over 35 perches and two roods and twenty five perches respectively. Murphy remained owner of this property until his death in 1921.

It would appear that Murphy did not live at St Lucia. His occupation, business and residential address are given in the Post Office Directories (PODs) of 1910-11 as "Accountant, London Bank Chambers, 62 Creek, Brisbane" and "Windermere Rd, Hamilton". He was also listed as a Justice of the Peace. After his death the property was administered by the Union Trustee Company of Australia Limited until March 1923 when it was transferred to Queensland Trustees Limited.

According to historian John Kerr, the hall's origins lay in local the Anglican parishioner's need for a Sunday school in the early 1920s. An agreement was reached with the local community that the Toowong parish council would purchase land for a hall and the community would meet the cost of its construction and also repay the cost of the land. Fundraising followed and, after the demise of the first building committee and the establishment of a second, the hall was eventually constructed in 1923 at a cost of approximately £430 plus £115 to provide a piano, seating and lighting.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately it became apparent the Church could not afford to keep the hall and in 1926 it was sold to the St Lucia Improvement and Debating Society for £500 on the basis that it could still be used on Sundays for services (there being no Anglican church in the community at that time) and Sunday school. It became known as the St Lucia Progress Hall. However it was not until the POD of 1927-28 that a "School of Arts" was shown in the listing for St Lucia Road, St Lucia. In addition the Refidex street directory of 1926-27 listed the "St Lucia Show Hall".

According to oral history sources the hall was built on stumps with a small verandah and "hosted the annual Progress Association's Show". Ground clearance was sufficient that the show lunch could be served under the hall. It was also used for other community occasions such as welcome home celebrations for returning servicemen. The hall was lowered at a later date, likely at the time of the addition of the Art Deco style facade.

The building remained a community hall until the immediate post war period. While it had served as a cinema during WWII, in May 1947 the Brisbane City Council received an application to convert the building into a "Picture Hall." The application was approved and the POD of 1949 shows the "Esquire Cinema" operating at St Lucia Road, St Lucia. By the mid 1950s the theatre was known as the "St Lucia Theatre."

By the time the hall assumed its new role, suburban picture theatres were an important part of the suburban landscape within Brisbane and other Queensland towns and cities. They provided convenient entertainment for local communities where public and private transport was limited or not available.

In July 1956 the property was sold to Henry and Dorothy Endres. An application was made and approval granted in 1958 to extend the theatre and to relax the ordinance regarding the requirement of a ceiling to be 20 feet (the theatre had only 18 foot ceilings).

The post war period saw an expansion of the St Lucia area. Residential expansion was primarily propelled by the growth of the University of Queensland. The concomitant success of the theatre was short lived as the property was acquired by the University of Queensland in February 1963. In 1975 the building was put into service as a teaching space by the University.

---

## Description

Originally a community hall, later a cinema, and currently utilised by the University of Queensland, the street facade of this building is characteristic of the Interwar Art Deco style; executed in a restrained manner. Points of note include the symmetrical design of the stepped parapet, vertical piers and monumental entrance. The building is elevated on a brick base and entered by a wide central flight of stairs.

---

## Statement of significance

### Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

---

### Historical

#### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as it is a building that has served a variety of purposes reflecting the changing needs and wishes of St Lucia

residents since 1923.

---

## Representative

### CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as it is a remaining Brisbane suburban picture theatre.

---

## Social

### CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as it has a longstanding connection with the St Lucia Community through its use as a Sunday school, community hall, cinema, and as a teaching space.

---

## References

1. John Kerr, *Christ Church St Lucia 40 Years*. pp.6-7
2. Brisbane City Council Sewerage Detail Plans
3. Brisbane City Council Building Card Records
4. *City of Brisbane Register of New Buildings for Month Ending 30th June 1926*
5. Certificates of Title.
6. *Estate Maps*. "Hyde Park, Toowong." John Oxley Estate Map No: 2542, 2543 & 2544
7. *History of St Lucia*. Cr. J. Magub Compiler. (1998; St Lucia Festival. St Lucia)
8. Information proved by the St Lucia History Group. Which included extracts from John Kerr's, *Christ Church St Lucia 40 years 2002* & other transcripts.
9. Post Office Directories
10. *Queensland Government Gazette*. 1921
11. *Refidex Directory Maps: Greater Brisbane Area*. (c1926-27)
12. *Reports and Proceedings of Brisbane City Council. July 1958 - June 1959*

---

## Copyright Brisbane City Council

**Note:** This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*