

Heritage Citation

Brunswick Home Furnishers showroom

Key details

Also known as	Henry Roberts' Building
Addresses	At 290 Water Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Shop/s
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L1_GTP4318; L2_GTP4318; L3_GTP4318; L4_GTP4318; L5_GTP4318; L6_GTP4318
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — February 2017
Construction	Walls: Masonry
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative

This set of commercial buildings was built between 1923 and 1928 for successful Brisbane builder and valuator, Henry Roberts. The first of the buildings, a brick two-storey building, was constructed in 1920 as a furniture showroom and workshop. Roberts' named the business Brunswick Home Furnishers and extended it in 1923-24 with the construction of a set of two ground-floor shops with rear timber workshop. This group of commercial buildings demonstrate the nature of this part of Brisbane as one of the city's premier furniture and home improvement precincts during the early twentieth century. The culturally significant buildings remaining are the set of one-storey brick shops with Water Street frontage.

History

At the turn of the century this end of Water Street was defined primarily residential with only one house recorded between Warry and Brunswick Street. By 1920, the Valley had established itself as a prime commercial district in Brisbane. As well as the shopping precinct centred on the Valley Corner, it was also an auspicious industrial area, with good transport and proximity to working-class suburbs. Expansion, however, in the centre of the Valley was beginning to reach its limits.

The streets, created when the Valley was a small, semi-rural town, were too narrow to cope with the huge influx of traffic, including trams. The newly-amalgamated Brisbane City Council began to carry out urgently-needed street widening projects, resuming extensive areas of land in prominent areas. Old companies, such as McWhirters, designed large new premises to replace smaller buildings. New companies trying to take advantage of the Valley's popularity and industrial advantages moved in, erecting new buildings in the Valley, such as the New England Motor Company's car assembly plant and General Motors Ltd's service station. As a consequence, land values in Fortitude Valley skyrocketed. In 1923 a Brunswick Street property sold for a record £500 a foot, and in 1925 five shops in the centre of the Valley were sold for almost £40,000.

But as the Valley Corner and surrounding areas struggled with overcrowding, large amounts of land became available on the fringes of the Valley. Substantial family estates had dominated the area around Gregory Terrace in the 1800s, but from the early twentieth century, the estates were divided into smaller lots and sold.

The Raff family's 'Grange Hill' estate, consisting of the 4-acre block along Gregory Terrace, Warry Street, Brunswick Street and Water Street, was one of the last large estates to be auctioned in 1921.

The affordability and location of the undeveloped 'Grange Estate' encouraged new businesses and residents to move to the outer areas of the Valley. It had the advantage of enabling businesses to construct large premises, without being too far from the Valley Corner. It was also well-situated for the Exhibition Grounds, where manufacturers could display their finished products, and for residents the proximity to the Victoria Park golf course and other leisure areas was a draw. Residences, particularly for city workers, began to emerge along Brunswick Street and business premises were constructed along Water Street.

Taking advantage of this activity was Henry Roberts, a successful Brisbane builder and valuator. After purchasing several large portions of land along Water Street, the application to construct a new brick store was successful and in 1921 his new workshop and store was recorded in Water Street.

The new building formed part of a small 'furniture precinct' on Water Street, with 'Bell Brothers' factory and showroom next door, the Wunderlich metal ceiling showrooms across the road. The massive Rhoades and Co, which had a furniture showroom on Wickham Street, also opened a store room on Water Street. Other furniture manufacturing companies in the Valley provided more competition for Henry Roberts, including Crafti on Wickham Street, and Edmund Rosenstengel's business in Brunswick Street.

In 1924, Brunswick Home Furnishers were featured in an article in the Brisbane Courier. The article detailed the benefits of shopping for furniture at the showrooms:

An inspection of the firm's showrooms reveals a unique method of presenting the various suites and pieces which go to complete the scheme for establishing home comforts. The spacious floor has been divided into several rooms, each containing attractive dining, drawing, or bedroom suites, as the case may be. Carpets, mats, and palmstands with palms, vases ... give a very pleasing and homelike effect (Brisbane Courier, 9 December 1924, p9).

The early -mid 1920s were years of relative prosperity in Brisbane for many residents. The horrors of the First

World War were in the past and the Great Depression was several years away. New styles of design emerged in fashion, architecture and art. A flurry of new house building was occurring throughout the city as more land was subdivided as the demand for residential development increased. With this housing boom, the furniture industry benefited as new home owners sought the most fashionable home furnishings.

Brunswick Home Furnishers continued to expand throughout the 1920s with another workshop with front showrooms constructed in 1923 and a bulk store with another showroom built in 1928. In 1930 Roberts' advertised in the *Brisbane Courier* and it was stated: "that he owns his own land, factory, and buildings, and by this fact and personal attention to his business has so reduced overhead expenses as to be able to offer excellent values in every department of home furnishing. These are displayed in the 100ft of dressed shop windows and in the spacious showroom" (*Brisbane Courier*, 16 December 1930, p.8).

The business continued well into the 1950s and today is historically important as evidence of this important industry in the 1920s and the way in which Fortitude Valley became the premier furniture and home improvement precincts at this time.

Description

The Brunswick Home Furnishers Showrooms is a one-storey masonry structure fronting Water Street. The street front has large showroom windows with fanlights, and recessed entries with paired glaze doors sheltered by a top-hung footpath awning. The buildings at the rear are not of cultural heritage significance.

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 a remnant of the significant commercial development that occurred in Fortitude Valley during the 1920s.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a set of interwar furniture showrooms.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places as a set of former interwar furniture showrooms.

References

1. Post Office Directories.
2. Certificates of Titles, Department of Natural Resources and Mines
3. Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, *The Character of Residential Areas, Brisbane*, A Study for the Brisbane City Council, 1994
4. Brisbane History Group, *Housing, Health, the River and the Arts*, Papers No. 3, 1985
5. Brisbane City Council Sewerage Maps
6. *Brisbane Courier*, 9 December 1924, p9
7. *Brisbane Courier*, 16 December 1930, p.8
8. *Brisbane Courier*, 20 December 1924, p23
9. Brisbane City Council Building Applications – 1920, 1923, 1928 and 1929
10. *Original Surveyor's Drawings*, 1924

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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.

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