

Heritage Citation



Filma Flats

Key details

Addresses	At 267 Gladstone Road, Dutton Park, Queensland 4102
Type of place	Flat building
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Composite
Lot plan	L1_BUP5476; L2_BUP5476; L3_BUP5476; L4_BUP5476; L5_BUP5476; L6_BUP5476; L7_BUP5476; L8_BUP5476; L9_BUP5476; L10_BUP5476; L11_BUP5476; L12_BUP5476; L13_BUP5476; L14_BUP5476

Key dates Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018
Date of Citation — June 2015

Construction Roof: Tile;
Walls: Masonry - Stucco

People/associations R Coutts and Sons (Architect)

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic

'Filma Flats' was built in 1934 for cinema manager Richard Francis Stephens. It was designed by experienced architectural firm R Coutts and Sons. The four brick flats of 'Filma Flats' were designed as a 'better class suburban flat' during the flat-building boom in Brisbane in the 1930s, when high density dwellings became popular in inner-city suburbs.

History

For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Dutton Park was not a popular residential area. A small amount of residential growth followed the 1884 gazettal of the park which gave the suburb its name. Gladstone Road was the focus of the development, with a school, orphanage and the Boggo Road Gaol also constructed in the decade. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, Dutton Park began to gain renown as a popular recreation area. The Dutton Park tramline extension was opened in 1901 and, in an attempt to encourage passengers, the Brisbane Tramway Company provided a garden theatre and held concerts in the Dutton Park reserve. In 1909 the company engaged R MacCallum and RF Stephens to run a moving picture 'Continental' program in the park. The scheme proved a success, with thousands using the tramline to attend the entertainment. Dutton Park, however, remained a largely non-residential suburb until after World War One. As the demand for inner-city housing increased in the 1920s, the suburb's proximity to the city, ready transport, and views of the river made it a more appealing residential suburb.

In 1924, Lily Maud Stephens became the owner of subdivision 7 of portion 189, a 22 perch site on the corner of Gladstone Road and Pope Street, Dutton Park. Her husband Richard Francis Stephens purchased subdivision 8, the adjacent block on Gladstone Road, two years later. Stephens was a theatre proprietor, and had run the Continentals in Dutton Park in 1909. In business with a range of partners, he went on to establish many of Brisbane's early theatres, including the Paddington Pavilion, Ascot Astoria, Lutwyche Imperial, Toowong Jubilee and New Farm Earl's Court, as well as theatres at Spring Hill and West End. Of these theatres only two remain, both on Brunswick Street: Earl's Court and the Merthyr Picture Palace, part of a highly successful theatre chain which Stephens ran with Charles Munro. By the time Mrs Stephens purchased the Dutton Park site, Stephens' main focus was 'Stephens' New Paddington Theatre', on Given Terrace.

In addition to their Gladstone Road properties, the Stephens' owned the adjoining land on the corner of Waterview and Pope Streets, where their home 'Hollywood' stood. A house was also built on the Gladstone Road and Pope Street intersection, which was leased to tenants.

One night in January 1932, returning to 'Hollywood' from the Paddington Theatre, the family was held up in an armed robbery and Mrs Stephens was killed. The trial was featured heavily in the media at the time. Theatre proprietors at the time were local identities, and Mrs Stephens was an 'attractive and well-known' woman. Her killers were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The Gladstone Road properties passed to Richard Stephens after his wife's death. In May 1934 Stephens engaged architectural firm R Coutts and Sons to design four brick flats on the Gladstone Road and Pope Street corner. Brisbane residents were slow to adapt to flat dwelling, preferring detached single family houses. Terrace houses and other multi-tenanted dwellings were discouraged by nineteenth century legislators, who were concerned about fire, disease and the development of slums. In the early twentieth century accommodation for temporary residents was provided in the form of boarding houses, usually created from old houses too large for their owners. This kind of accommodation was viewed as acceptable for city-workers and bachelors, but flat dwelling was considered to have a 'demoralising effect' on its inhabitants. After World War One, however, the growing population in inner-city Brisbane demanded closer development, while the exemption of flats from the *Fair Rent Act 1920* encouraged investors to this new type of dwelling.

Not least in the effort to have the value of flats recognised was Joseph Vaudville Douyere Coutts, principal architect of R Coutts and Sons. Coutts was the editor of the *Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland*, and is believed to have written the journal's guidelines for successful flat development in 1933. The article emphasised aesthetic design, site selection – including size, topography and accessibility – and the importance of light and air for each flat.

Stephens' site met the all article's criteria. The large, flat allotment had ample room for four flats. Its corner position enabled maximum light and air to reach the flats. It had access to transport, with the Dutton Park tramline running past the property on Gladstone Road, and was within walking distance of shopping facilities, workplaces and schools. It was also on the border of Dutton Park and Highgate Hill; despite Dutton Park's growing popularity the latter was still the more recognised suburb.

By 1934 the popularity of flats in Brisbane was nearing a peak. In June 1934 twelve purpose-built flat buildings were under or pending construction, an unprecedented number for Brisbane. Focus shifted to the quality of the accommodation, and Coutts' design reflected increasing calls for a better class of flats. 'The demand for first-class compact flats in Brisbane is still undiminished,' announced the *Courier Mail*, describing Stephens' flats for its readers:

The building will be of two stories, each containing two flats, separated by sound-proof brick walls... Four garages, a complete laundry, and separate lavatories are provided. Each flat will have an 8ft. balcony to the front and a service balcony at the rear. The flats will have polished hardwood floors, ceilings of fibrous plaster, while the inside walls will be of plaster and the outside will be texture finished.¹

Although R Coutts and Sons were in practice from 1914, and Coutts was outspoken on the importance of flats, this appears to be one of the few flat buildings that the firm designed. It is likely to be the only surviving example of Coutts's flat design, as later designs 'Clarence Court' in South Brisbane and 'Gloria Court' in Spring Hill do not appear to be extant.

The successful tenderer for the flats, contractor Charles Day, completed work by November 1934, when the 'recently erected' flats were featured in the *Courier Mail*:

'Filma Flats' were ready for occupation by 1935. In addition to the features listed in the Courier Mail article, each two-bedroom flat had its own refrigerator, and faced east on the Pope Street frontage of the site. While not reaching the luxury of some of the flats erected in Brisbane around the same time (such as 'San Remo' in South Brisbane or 'Coronet' in New Farm), Stephens' flats offered a level of 'sophistication' to its tenants, appealing to a wealthier group of flat-dwellers than those who occupied the converted boarding houses. At an estimated cost of £2,100, they had also cost considerably more than the conversion of a house on site would.

The Stephens family continued to reside in 'Hollywood' and leased 'Filma Flats' to tenants. Occupants included Bruce Young, who built a braille globe from the sunroom of his Pope Street flat for blind French organist André Marchal, in 1953. The globe appears to be in the museum Valentin Haüy in Paris.

In 1957 Stephens added his two sons to the title of the flats, and died the following year. The brothers retained the property until 1982. In 1983 the property was amalgamated with subdivision 8, which had its own block of flats (circa 1950s). Each flat is now owned by an individual owner.

Description

Filma Flats is a two-storey, rendered brick set of interwar flats situated on the prominent corner of Gladstone Road and Pope Street. The flats have a tiled roof and a series of original timber sash windows and timber and glass front doors. The front parapet and verandah displays 'Spanish Mission' features. There are also many 'Art Deco' elements throughout the building, including the name and date of construction of the flats. The original front fence, steps and gate remain. The interior also retains many interwar features and is relatively intact. The rear timber stairs are also retained.

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

for the evidence it provides of the pattern of construction of purpose built flats in Dutton Park during the 1930s and as a reflection of the growth in popularity of the multi-unit dwelling in Brisbane.

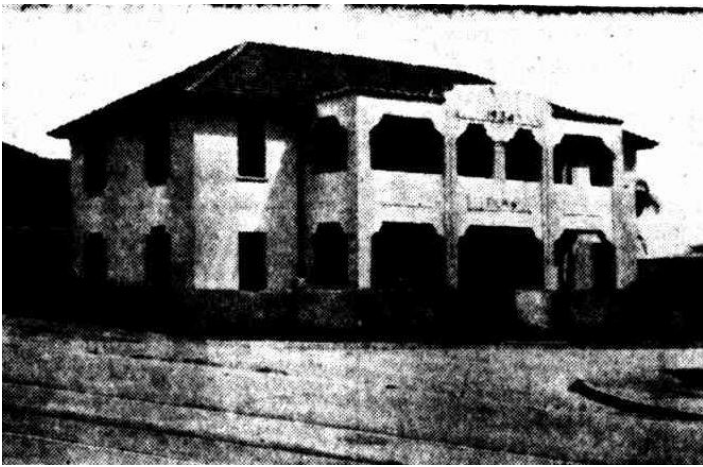
Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a well-designed block of flats with balanced proportions, fine detailing and an appealing use of contrasting materials.

Supporting images



Building and Real Estate (1934, November 13). The Courier-Mail (Brisbane, Qld. : 1933 - 1954), p. 9.

Retrieved October 2, 2019, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article35640846>

References

1. *Courier Mail*, 4 May 1934 p19
2. The Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland, Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1934
3. Bennett, Helen, *Interpreting the Modern: flatland in Brisbane 1920-1941*, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 2011
4. Brisbane City Council aerial photographs, 1946, 2012
5. Brisbane City Council Archives, Brisbane Images

6. Brisbane City Council City Architecture and Heritage Team, citations
7. Brisbane City Council, Water Supply and Sewerage Detail Plans, 1937
8. Brisbane City Council, Properties on the Web, Building Cards, Building Register
9. Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Entries on the Queensland Heritage Register, Village Twin Cinemas [602101], Paddington Antiques Centre [601654]
10. Department of Natural Resources, Certificates of Title
11. McKellar's Map of Brisbane and Suburbs. Brisbane: Surveyor-General's Office, 1895
12. Queensland Places: Dutton Park (website)
13. Queensland Post Office Directories
14. State Library of Queensland, Picture Queensland
15. *Courier Mail*, 13 November 1939, p9

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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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