

Heritage Citation



Key details

Also known as	Bell's Building
Addresses	At 145 Elizabeth Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000; At 123 Albert Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Shop/s, Warehouse
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Composite
Lot plan	L51_RP890812; L51_RP890812
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — June 2006
Construction	Walls: Masonry

People/associations	Robert Smith (Robin) Dods (Architect)
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Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association
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This building was completed in 1898 as a warehouse and store for merchant John Bell. In the 1950s, the building was incorporated into King's multi-storey car park. The use of the building reflects the expansion of a warehouse and light industrial sector in the area originally known as 'Frogs Hollow' during the nineteenth century, the increasing importance of the motor car in Brisbane, and the subsequent need for parking space in the Central Business District (CBD). The building is also significant in that it is one of only three remaining CBD commercial buildings designed by renowned architect Robin Dods.

History

This building was constructed in 1898 as a warehouse and store for the import merchant business of John Bell. Bell's firm specialised in taking orders for overseas goods from customers and then arranging for the items to be delivered to its warehouse in Elizabeth Street. Bell was one of a number of small merchants who competed with larger companies for the business that was drawn from Brisbane's busy wharves.

John Bell was an established merchant in his native home of Paisley, Scotland when, at more than fifty years of age, he moved his family and business to Brisbane during the 1880s. Due to there being several men named John Bell working in Brisbane at the same time, and in similar businesses, it has been difficult to accurately locate Bell in other premises prior to the construction of the building in 1898. Nonetheless, at the time of his death in 1911, aged 81, he was recognised as one of the "oldest personalities among the commercial fraternity of Queensland".¹

The construction of Bell's Warehouse in Elizabeth Street reflects the predominant use of land in the area originally known as 'Frogs Hollow', which was bounded approximately by Alice, George, Elizabeth and Edward Streets. Until the late nineteenth century, the area was prone to flooding and possessed a dubious reputation due to the presence of brothels and opium dens. The area was also characterised by residences, boarding houses, hotels and the Chinese Quarter. From the 1880s onward, however, the area came to be increasingly dominated by warehouses and light industry. This was because of the area's proximity to the city's busy wharves located on the Town Reach of the river. The construction of this warehouse in Elizabeth Street reflects this broader trend, which is an important aspect of the development of Brisbane's CBD.

The architectural firm of Hall and Dods, comprised of Francis Richard Hall and Robert (Robin) Dods, designed the building. Hall and Dods were in partnership between 1896 and 1913 and are credited with initiating "an architectural revolution in Brisbane".² This resulted from Dods' own architectural imagination and his inclusion of philosophical ideas, absorbed from the British Arts and Crafts movement and Edwardian Classicism during time spent studying and working in Edinburgh and London, to produce functional answers to geographical problems faced by the home and business owners of Queensland.³ As Hall was regarded as the manager of the firm, it is likely that the majority of design work, including the John Bell Warehouse, fell to Dods.⁴

Robin Dods became one of Brisbane's most significant architects and his architectural style was much imitated

throughout the early years of the twentieth century. Though mainly a designer of suburban residences, Dods also designed commercial buildings in the CBD. The John Bell Warehouse is one of only three known examples of Dods' commercial building designs surviving in the CBD. The other examples are the remnant of Paten's Building in George Street and Blake House in Adelaide Street (which was a joint design with F.R. Hall). Bell's Warehouse was constructed by T.B. Baumber and cost \$2,711.⁵

Upon the death of John Bell, title of the warehouse passed to his three sons. John Bell's eldest son, Richard, leased the upper floor of the warehouse and carried on the original business. The remainder of the building was leased to various tenants over the following years, including printers, biscuit manufacturers and various warehouse firms. In 1922, Bell's sons transferred title of the building from their own names to a company named John Bell & Co Limited. In 1927, title of the building was transferred to Bell's Buildings Limited and at this time the building itself was listed in the Queensland Post Office Directory as 'Bell's Building'. John Bell & Co Limited remained in the building until 1943 and the separate company Bell's Building Limited until 1944. The building was referred to as 'Bells Building' until 1948.

The building was incorporated into a multi-storey car park in the 1950s, reflecting the increasing significance of the motorcar and the need for parking space within the CBD. The building was referred to as 'Kings Parking' as early as 1951 and alterations to integrate the building into a multi-storey car park were carried out by 1955.

Pearce Parking Station Pty Ltd purchased the site in 1959 (though this company was responsible for alterations to the building as from 1953). Further alterations, consistent with utilising the site as a car park, continued throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In May 1967, title to the building passed to the present owners Kings Parking Company (Qld) Pty Ltd.

It is not known when the vehicle entrance was cut through the first floor façade or when the stone balustrade that originally adorned the top of the façade parapet was removed. Both changes would have taken place during the integration of the building into the car park. The building's top floor remains largely intact and retains features such as timber trusses and two crossbeams holding a steel pulley wheel that mark its earlier use as a nineteenth century warehouse.

In 1986, John Bell's Warehouse was featured in The Dream Palace Heritage Walk that was produced by the National Trust of Queensland.

Description

This two-storey small building displays some architectural elements from both the Federation Free Classical and the Federation Romanesque styles. It has a symmetrical façade and balustraded parapet with decorative, emphatic cornice below.

Contrasting textures as well as different design delineate the ground and first floors. While the first floor façade has nine very narrow vertical multi-paned sash windows in groups of three windows each, the ground floor façade featured two Romanesque arched windows with decorative keystone flanking a Romanesque arched entrance that has a keystone featuring a cartouche.

The lower part of the ground floor façade, a little below the spring of the arches is now demolished while the top floor façade remains intact.

The floorboards that were originally a few steps over the footpath have been dropped down to the level of the footpath. Floorboards have been inserted underneath the arches of the ground floor windows to provide an intermediary floor for car parking.

The original steel beams (imported from Scotland) that supported the original top floor can still be seen.

The original top floor is intact except for the missing rear wall. Its floorboards are hidden under sheeting. The original windows and fittings remain and the internal ceiling roses can also be seen. The ceiling retains its timber trusses and two crossbeams, which still hold the steel pulley wheel used when the building was a warehouse. The galvanised iron roof remains.

The later rear addition to the building has no 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 evidence of the development and expansion of light industry in the Brisbane CBD's 'Frogs Hollow' in the late nineteenth century.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as a small, nineteenth century warehouse that has retained intact original features on its top floor.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an attractive, architect-designed building that exhibits elements of the Federation Free Classical and Federation Romanesque styles of architecture, making a fine contribution to the streetscape.

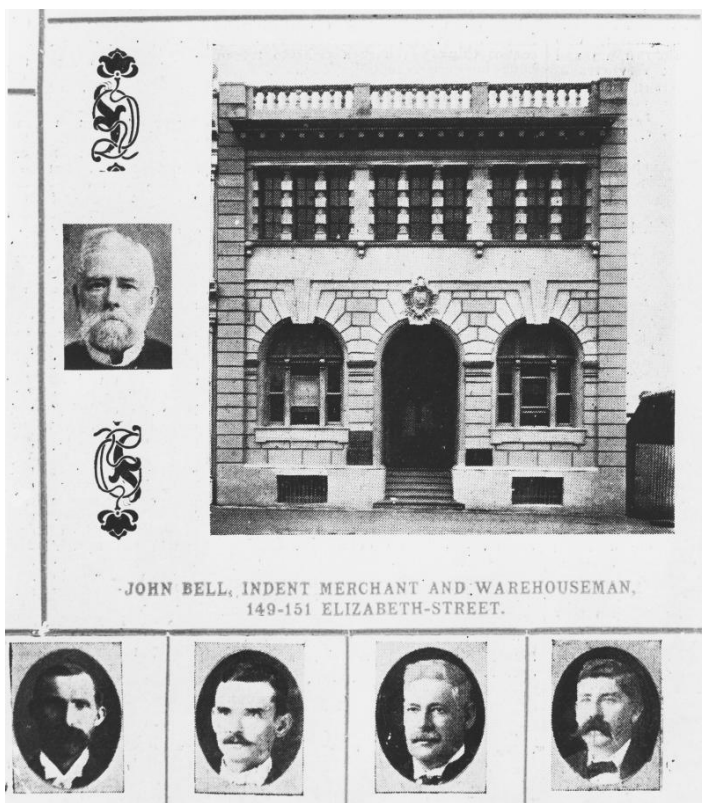
Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as one of the only remaining CBD commercial building designed by significant architect Robin Dods.

Supporting images



Unknown photographer,
'Building of John Bell, indent merchant and

warehouseman, 149-151 Elizabeth Street, ca. 1903',
John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

Situated between Albert and Edward Streets on the east face of Elizabeth Street, this building was erected for John Bell, ca. 1898. (Robin Dods, Architect). Today, (1978) it is a section of King's Parking Station.

The photograph of the building, is surrounded by various portraits. The one to the left of the building, possibly John Bell or Robin Dods? At the base of the photograph are four more unidentified portraits.

User comment(s): This image comes from a special feature "Business Brisbane" included in the Brisbane Courier on 6 December 1907 and appears on page 16.

John Bell is shown to the left of his warehouse. Below are (left to right) J. Walker, G. S. Decker, Frank Green and R.J Peacock. (Description supplied with photograph)

References

1. *The Brisbane Courier*, 31 August 1911, n.p.
2. Donald Watson & Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century*, Brisbane, Queensland Museum, 1994, p. 84
3. *Ibid*
4. *Ibid*
5. *John Hall & Son Tender Book 1895-1912*, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, Mss OM75-112
6. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, post-1946 building approval cards
7. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
8. Brisbane History Group, *Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940: Three walking tours of the CBD*, Brisbane History Group Inc., 2002
9. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
10. *John Hall & Son Tender Book 1895-1912*, Mss Om75-112, John Oxley Library, Brisbane
11. Mahlstedt & Son City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 16, 1951
12. *The Dream Palace Heritage Walk*, Brisbane, National Trust of Queensland, 1986
13. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1911
14. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
15. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane:

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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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