

## Heritage Citation



### Maher's Chambers

#### Key details

Addresses	At 206 Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Shop/s
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Free Style
Lot plan	L1_RP132472; L409_SL1633
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — January 2015
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Brick - Painted

**People/associations** George David Payne (Architect)

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

Maher's Chambers was built in 1911 for Fortitude Valley baker and entrepreneur William Maher. Brisbane architect George Payne, who also designed St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, was responsible for its design. It was constructed during a building boom in the Valley, when Wickham and Brunswick Streets rivalled Brisbane city as a commercial precinct.

## History

William Maher, an Irish emigrant, established himself as a baker in Wickham Street, near the Union Hotel, in November 1877. Wickham Street had developed from the 1860s as a secondary street, a quiet road which was sparsely populated by timber and weatherboard cottages and shops and ended in a swamp. The street was not prestigious, although Maher's bakery was located towards the more developed end of the street, close to the city.

Maher and his bakery moved to Brunswick Street in the 1880s, as an economic boom encouraged denser population and more permanent buildings in the Valley. The baker contributed to the street's expansion with a substantial, two-storey residential and commercial building. He built up his business despite the difficulties of the baking industry in the late nineteenth century, including several strikes brought on by labour disputes between the master bakers and their employed journeyman bakers. Maher rose to the top as one of the former by 1886, running a highly successful bakery, which supplied the Brisbane General Hospital and the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institute with bread through the 1890s. His personal status was reflected in his 1898 appointment as a justice of the peace in the Valley. By 1901 his bakery business was one of the largest in Brisbane, purchasing 1000 tons of flour in a single order from the Adelaide Milling Company. Similar orders were made in 1905 (for 'Diamond Flour') and 1907, for 'Sea Foam Flour' from the Brisbane Milling Company, which was reported to be the largest single purchase of Queensland flour at the time.

In this midst of his success, Maher purchased a parcel of one rood and 22.5 perches in Wickham Street, not far from Brunswick Street, in January 1902. The site had been in a comparatively popular area of Wickham Street in the 1860s, located between the first Catholic Church in the Valley and the Prince Consort Hotel. Originally part of the four acre allotment granted to James Gibbon in 1850, the site had been purchased in 1868 by Joseph Lewthwaite, forming part of a large estate held in trust for his daughter Marian from his death in 1873 until 1901. The trust prevented subdivision of the block as Wickham Street developed around it, with multi-tenanted shops and hotels emerging along the street from the 1880s, including a newly designed Prince Consort Hotel. The Valley's progress continued and as the twentieth century dawned, it was fast becoming a vital commercial and industrial destination. The intersection of Brunswick and Wickham Streets, the 'Valley Corner', was the new hub of the suburb.

Spurred on by the growth of the Valley, as well as a city-wide building boom, Maher's neighbours had been constructing new premises through the first decade of the twentieth century. In the vicinity of the Valley Corner, owner-occupied drapery/department stores embarked on expansion, with Overell's, T.C. Beirne, McWhirters and

Foy and Gibson all commissioning new buildings or additions. Queen Street business owners began to cast about for Valley land to open Valley branches, as small business proprietors gave way to those with much more capital, although the Valley had not yet reached the Queen Street high of £500 per foot. Wealthy investors erected new investment properties, particularly along Wickham Street around Maher's property: John Watson, owner of the former Catholic Church site, had a new commercial property constructed and rented, as did William Walton, Alonzo Sparkes, the Honourable Peter Murphy and William Woodley on the opposite side of the street.

Tenders for the construction of four shops and offices for Maher were called from December 1910. The old buildings, occupied by Maher's son P.J., a baker and tearoom operator, a bootmaker, a hairdresser and a fruiterer, were advertised for removal 'on account of the erection of New Buildings on the Property.'<sup>1</sup> The advertisements were repeated in January 1911, when P.J. Maher sold the furniture and fittings from his teashop. Maher received approval from the Brisbane Municipal Council for the new building in January 1911. Brisbane architect George Payne was responsible for the building's flamboyant design, while C. Fawkes was its builder.

After receiving recognition for his designs in architectural competitions (including the design for the Royal Bank for the firm of Loweish and Moorhouse), George Payne established an architectural firm in Sydney in the 1890s. He relocated to Brisbane as a temporary draftsman in the Queensland Public Works Department, taking advantage of the large amount of work offered by the building boom. Payne's most recognisable contribution to Brisbane's architecture is St Andrew's Uniting Church [600086], although in his work for the Public Works Department he also contributed to the design of several outstanding public buildings in Queensland, including the Rockhampton Customs House, the Townsville Customs House, detail work on first floor verandahs of the Warwick Post Office, and the East Brisbane State School. The Wickham Street building for Maher was designed after Payne had returned to private practice, which he continued until his death in 1916.

Maher's building was still under construction in October 1911 when one of the carpenters fell from the building and broke his leg. By December 1911, J.G. Wrench 'The Ladies' Draper' announced the commencement of his business in Maher's new buildings, with 'a complete stock of everything that is required for Ladies' and Children's wear at Lowest Valley Prices.' Lessees Shaw and Sons Ltd also announced their temporary location in the new building in the Telegraph of February 1912:

*Our Valley Branch is now removed from Brunswick Street to Maher's New Buildings, Wickham Street, near the Valley Corner.*<sup>2</sup>

From 1912 the name Maher's Chambers appears in the Queensland Post Office Directories, with lessees (including an optician, estate agents, a fresh food supply company, butchers' supplier, and refreshment rooms) listed underneath. A 1913 photograph showing the west side of Wickham Street under close inspection shows a part of this building, confirming it had been fully constructed by 1913.

In July 1913, Maher had plans for a new brick building at the back of the chambers approved by the Brisbane Municipal Council. C. Fawkes was again to be the builder, although there was no architect listed.

The Valley continued its commercial growth and popularity over the ensuing three decades, and Maher's Chambers continued to provide leasehold space for a number of small businesses. Located on what was now a main road, directly opposite the Melba Picture Theatre, not far from the major department stores and on a tram line, it was easy for customers to find. Lessees included tailors and dressmakers, estate agents, solicitors, florists, clairvoyants, masseuses and chiropodists, tea shops, the Valley Spiritual Church and the Ladies College of Health.

A 1930 photograph clearly depicts the building before it underwent the changes in paintwork and ornamentation, which give it its Asian character today.

The Maher family owned the building until 1949, when the property was transferred to the Brisbane Supply Company. In 1970 Place Pty Ltd purchased Maher's Chambers, adding it to their allotment of 22.79 perches on Brunswick Street. The entire 2,155m<sup>2</sup><sup>3</sup> property was reclassified as a single lot in 1975, which it remains today.

The buildings on both frontages have been connected and are known collectively as the 'Chopstix Arcade'. Since 1992 the Chambers have been owned by a family trust and used for retail, entertainment and restaurants and offices.

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## Description

This unusually styled symmetrical building is two storeyed, of masonry construction with a shopping arcade to the ground floor and offices above.

Above awning level, two flanking bays contain large semi-circular headed windows surmounted by corbelled cornices and extending up as solid masonry parapets returning at the sides into the roof slope. The front sections of the parapet have central triangular pediments flanked by inverted semi circular arches.

The central portion of the building has three panels of square headed windows protected by a wide belled eaves overhang supported on large moulded brackets. A central turret repeats the cornice line and inverted arch of the flanking parapets, and is capped by a concave pyramidal roof and weather vane. The gabled roof runs parallel to the frontage of the building, is sheeted with galvanised corrugated iron, and has a semi-circular louvered vent each side of the central turret.

The ground floor has masonry piers with moulded capitals subdividing the shopfront bays, which have large glazed semi-circular arched tops. The awning roof slopes to the outside edge, and is supported on segmental arch brackets springing from the tops of the masonry piers. Minor alterations have occurred with paint colour schemes and signwriting, and to the ground floor shopfronts, and awning fascia.

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## 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:

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## Historical

### CRITERION A

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

as it reflects the growing importance of Fortitude Valley as a commercial centre in the early years of the twentieth century.

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## Aesthetic

### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an example of an unusual architectural style compared with the style of contemporary buildings. It is also important as part of an extensive group of similarly scaled buildings of flamboyant design.

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## References

1. *The Brisbane Courier*, 17 December 1910 p.9
2. *The Telegraph*, 24 February 1912 p2
3. *The Brisbane Courier*, 12 December 1911 p.9
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. Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Certificates of Title
10. McKellar's Map of Brisbane and Suburbs. Brisbane: Surveyor-General's Office, 1895
11. National Library of Australia's Trove website, *The Brisbane Courier*, *The Telegraph*, *The Queenslander*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Sunday Mail*
12. Queensland Places: Fortitude Valley (website)
13. Queensland Post Office Directories
14. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Picture Queensland

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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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