

Heritage Citation

Nirvana

Key details

Addresses	At 17 Rosary Crescent, Highgate Hill, Queensland 4101
Type of place	Flat building
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Queenslander
Lot plan	L20_RP806637
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — May 2015
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic

This two-storey block of four flats, of timber frame construction, with weatherboard cladding and galvanised iron roof, erected circa 1925-26, is a relatively rare, very intact early example of its type. Its symmetrical architectural composition, materials and original detailing result in a building of considerable aesthetic significance, in its own right, and within the Rosary Crescent streetscape. Nirvana flats are important in demonstrating Brisbane's development pattern in the interwar period, in particular in Highgate Hill, and the way in which ideas about acceptable forms of housing were changing.

History

The title for the land on which Rosary Crescent is located was first issued in August 1860. Following a number of subdivisions, in September 1918, a total of 3 acres of land was purchased by Archbishop Duhig. In February

1919, the Ursuline Order opened a convent on the site, its first convent in Queensland, and from here they constructed and ran St Ita's school in Gladstone Street, opposite the site. The convent was short lived, with the Ursuline Order moving to Oxley in 1924.

On 18 November 1924, auctioneers announced the sale of the Rosary Hill Estate, which comprised sixteen magnificent building sites. The name of the estate reflects the former use of the site by a Catholic Order convent. The lot on which the flats were built was purchased by Lily Bull, described as wife of Arthur George Bull.

It would appear that development of the site commenced soon after the sale of a number of the lots. In July 1925, an Alderman for the South Brisbane Council, within which area the development lay, complained of the 'disgraceful' state of the Rosary Hill Estate. The place was in a shocking condition with houses already being built on it without drainage and water channelling.

This was the period in which the multi-unit dwelling began to emerge as an alternative to the traditional Brisbane house and yard. Prior to this in larger Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne this style of 'modern' living, in blocks of flats, had become a stylish alternative to living in the traditional house.

In the 1920s and 1930s, to cater for the housing shortage as well as to generate income, many home owners in the inner-city suburbs converted houses into tenements, where tenants would share bathrooms, toilets and kitchens. This led to community concerns of overcrowding and increased hygiene problems. A fashionable and more sophisticated alternative to this form of accommodation was the purpose built block of self-contained flats. Marketed mainly at single people and childless couples the earliest self-contained flats in Brisbane were generally conveniently situated close to trams, trains and shopping facilities in inner-city suburbs such as Spring Hill, New Farm and Fortitude Valley.

The Brisbane City Council, in 1930, defined the flat as "a fully self-contained dwelling, with private kitchen, bathroom and water closet". The flat was designed to be an independently functioning dwelling. Although seen as a sophisticated lifestyle, flat living was fairly uncommon in Brisbane in this period, with only 8.4% of Brisbane residents living in flats. This low percentage may be due to the economic constraints of the time as well as the perceived novelty of this style of living. Most interwar flats in Brisbane were architecturally designed and constructed from good quality brick and timber.

The flats were constructed over the period 1925-26, with a new flat in the block being advertised for renting in November 1926. From contemporary descriptions, internally each flat comprised "four rooms, and a long verandah enclosed" containing "2 bedrooms, dining and breakfast rooms, arched, kitchen, gas stove, bathroom, enamel bath, basin and geyser, laundry gas copper". The flats were built for letting, and have remained in single ownership since constructed.

From an examination of comparative information on inter-war flats in Brisbane, it is considered the building is a rare, early and very intact example of its type. The timber frame and weatherboarding finish is comparatively rare for two-storey flats, with the vast majority of timber framed flats post-dating 1926 including fibro sheeting. This was due to concerns about the combustibility of all timber construction for multi-occupancy buildings.

Description

Nirvana flats is a two-storey timber-framed building with weatherboarding exterior cladding and corrugated iron

roof sheeting, sitting on concrete stumps. It contains two flats to the ground floor, with front access, and two flats to the first floor with side access.

It is symmetrical in design with a central half-timbered infill gable resting on projecting joists, which projects slightly forward and above a hipped roof. There are separate lean-to roofs on projecting brackets to the side elevations.

To the ground floor there are two projecting gabled entrance porches, with decorative board balustrade and paired posts, infilled with louvered glazing above. Stair access is from the side. There is a pair of slightly projecting rectangular bays with corrugated iron roofs and three casement windows, supported on four projecting chamfered floor joists. There is a row of casement windows running along the side elevations, enclosing a verandah.

The first floor has a pair of matching projecting bays of the same design as the ground floor. There is a matching pair of four casement windows to the front elevation above the projecting porches, enclosing a verandah. The side elevations at first floor are asymmetrical with the door and staircase to the west side being set further back than the east side, which has the door and staircase (accessed from the rear) more centrally placed. There are rows of casement windows extending two-thirds of the elevation enclosing a verandah. There is a simple vertical timber valance between the concrete stumps.

Many of the internal interwar features remain.

Externally, the building appears to be very original in terms of its form, materials and detailing, although it does appear the timber hand rails have been replaced. The front wall is also relatively recent, and original garage block has been removed. The building externally appears to be in good repair.

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 Highgate Hill during the 1920s and as a reflection of the growth in popularity of the multi-unit dwelling in Brisbane.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as a two-storey timber framed and weatherboard clad, block of four flats dating from 1925-26, it is a rare, early example of this type of building, which became increasingly popular during the latter half of the inter-war years in Brisbane. Timber framed flats after this period incorporated fibro-cladding, due to concerns about the combustibility of all timber construction for multi-occupation dwellings, and it is thus a rare surviving example of its type.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as an intact, original, early and very good example of a two-storey timber-framed and timber clad block of flats designed in a traditional tin and timber domestic style.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its symmetrical architectural composition, materials and original detailing resulting in a building of considerable aesthetic significance, which makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Rosary Crescent.

References

1. Queensland Certificates of Title
2. *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 February 1919, p 9; Daily Standard, 11 February 1919, p 2
3. *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 August 1924, p 13 The Ursuline Order built a new convent in Corinda which was opened in December 1924
4. *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 November 1924, p 20

5. *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 December 1924, p 9
 6. *The Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1925, p 16 and *Brisbane Courier*, 25 March 1925, p 10
 7. *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 July 1925 p 4
 8. *The Telegraph*, 28 July 1925 p 16
 9. *The Telegraph*, 17 November 1925 p 15
 10. *The Brisbane Courier*, 9 November 1926, p 3
 11. *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 January 1927, p 24; and *Brisbane Courier*, 13 December 1926, p 8
 12. *The Courier Mail*, 29 October 1938, p 12
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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.

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



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