

Heritage Citation



Queensland Teachers' Union Building (former)

Key details

Also known as	The Teachers' Building, Elizabeth House
Addresses	At 81 Elizabeth Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Office building
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Georgian Revival
Lot plan	L1_BUP104880; L2_BUP104880; L3_BUP104880; L4_BUP104880; L5_BUP104880; L9_BUP104880; L10_BUP104880; L8_SP135215

Key dates

Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009
Date of Citation — February 2011

Construction

Roof: Terracotta tile;
Walls: Masonry

People/associations

John Leslie Baldwin (Architect)

Criterion for listing

(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

Erected in 1929, the former Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) Building was the first office building purpose-built for an individual trade union. Designed by John Leslie Baldwin, the building had a basement car park for tenants, which was unusual for the time, an elaborate ballroom and a conference room on the top floor. The ornately decorated ballroom was the venue for the annual QTU conferences. Many important QTU campaigns were run from this building including the push for the tertiary training of teachers, the removal of discrimination against married women teachers and higher pay for teachers. The QTU continued to occupy the premises until 1974.

History

The Board of Trustees of the Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees, otherwise known as the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU), purchased the site for this building on 29 November 1927 for £5,850. In early 1928, architect John Leslie Baldwin was commissioned to design an office building for the Union. The QTU, formed in 1889, is one of Queensland's oldest trade unions and was the first trade union for teachers to be formed in Australia. The commissioning of this building was unusual, as it was the first time that an individual trade union erected a building for its specific use. Previously, trade unions operated out of leased premises or, collectively from Trades Hall (built 1922) in Turbot Street.

Baldwin was a Brisbane-born architect who trained in Sydney before returning to Brisbane in 1923 where he ran an architectural practice until 1932. By May 1928, it was reported that Baldwin had drafted plans for a four-storey reinforced concrete building that included a flat roof and a basement. Reflecting the spread of Brisbane's retail precinct out of Queen Street and into the surrounding streets, Baldwin's design included space for two shops plus commercial offices on the ground floor and the provision for a café in the basement. The first floor was to be used by the QTU, while the second and third floors were leased as city offices. The fourth floor included a QTU conference room and ballroom that featured a generous use of silky oak and a sprung floor. The building was designed in the Florentine Renaissance style, which was rarely used for Brisbane's buildings. It was remarked that Baldwin's design "strikes a new note in Brisbane" and compared "very favourably with the most up-to-date buildings in Brisbane."¹

Brisbane builder Peter Frew completed the Queensland Teachers' Union Building during 1929 for a total cost of approximately £22,000. The terracotta roofing tiles and the building's ornamental zinc work in the awning and elsewhere were provided locally by Wunderlich Ltd. Particular effort was put into the ornate wood-panelled wall

and plaster ceiling of the conference room and ballroom on the top floor. This was because this room was to be used for the annual QTU state conference and the annual teachers' ball. It was reported that this room was to be "elaborately furnished and will surpass anything of its kind yet in Brisbane" for "no expense is being spared to make it attractive and comfortable".² The building was finished and occupied by 1930.

A number of important QTU campaigns were run from this building. These included the abolition of the automatic sacking of female teachers after they were married; the move away from one-year trained teachers to three-year diploma courses run from Queensland's new teachers' colleges and colleges of advanced education; changes to state school curriculums and higher pay and better conditions for teachers. This building remained the QTU's headquarters until the union moved to new headquarters (now Landmark Place) in Boundary Street, Spring Hill in 1974. The QTU sold 81 Elizabeth Street to Myer Realty Ltd on 6 May 1977.

As with most commercial premises within the CBD, the Queensland Teachers' Union Building has undergone a number of internal changes. Brisbane City Council approved alterations to the building in 1952, 1960, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 and 1978. The exterior and interior of the ground floor, in particular, has been altered from its original appearance due to two new shop fronts. The pressed metal ceiling in the awning was damaged by the insertion of strobe lights for a basement nightclub in the 1980s and the ceiling is now covered with modern materials. The ornate conference room and ballroom is still largely intact.

Patricia and Siobhan Cosgrave noted the Queensland Teachers' Union Building as once "possessing a roof garden and a magnificent conference hall of silky oak" in their 1989 publication *The Brisbane Year Book*.³ The Brisbane History Group identified the Queensland Teachers' Union Building as a part of Brisbane's commercial heritage in 2002, when they included it in their publication *Walking Tours – Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*.

Description

This elegant, four-storey building with basement contains strong elements of the Interwar Georgian Revival style. Its transverse gable roof is finely textured with terracotta tiles. The building's symmetrical façade is defined by distinctive quoining at both ends and defined by a generous ornate cornice above the top floor, almost square shaped, windows. An ornate stringcourse visually separates this row of windows from the lower part of the building where two very large two-storey high Romanesque arched windows are centrally located.

A suspended awning with nameplate and ornamental zinc work hangs over the footpath. The pressed metal ceiling in the awning was damaged when strobe lights were inserted into it for a basement nightclub and the ceiling is now covered with modern materials.

The ground floor occupied by shops is the least intact part of this otherwise almost pristine building.

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 commercial character and development of Brisbane's CBD during the interwar period.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage for its intact, finely-detailed, decorative ballroom and conference room; and, as one of few buildings in Brisbane designed in the Florentine Renaissance style.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance for the architectural quality, elegant proportions and refined decorative details of its street frontage as well as the fine architectural and decorative elements of its interior.

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 for its 45 year association with the Queensland Teachers' Union, one of the oldest trade unions in Australia.

References

1. J.V.D. Coutts (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*, 10 May 1928, p.59
 2. Quoted in Brisbane History Group, *Walking Tours – Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*, (Brisbane: Brisbane History Group, 2002), p.30
 3. Cosgrove, Patricia & Cosgrove, Siohban, *The Brisbane Year Book*, Sydney, Collins, 1989
 4. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website, post-1946 building cards
 5. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
 6. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map 1913
 7. Brisbane History Group, *Walking Tours – Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*, Brisbane, Brisbane History Group, 2002
 8. Cosgrove, Patricia & Cosgrove, Siohban, *The Brisbane Year Book*, Sydney, Collins, 1989
 9. Coutts, J.V.D. (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland*, 1928.
 10. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland. Certificates of Title and other records
 11. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
 12. John Oxley Library, newspaper clippings files
 13. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 12, 1951
 14. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
 15. Watson, Donald & McKay, Judith, *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940*, Brisbane, Fryer Memorial Library, 1984
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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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