



Heritage Citation



Sutton House

Key details

Addresses	At 133 George Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Shop/s, Shophouse

Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Georgian Revival, Spanish Mission
Lot plan	L1_SL11288
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — June 2006
Construction	Roof: Terracotta tile; Walls: Masonry - Render
People/associations	Atkinson, Powell and Conrad (Architect); John Hutchinson (Builder)
Criterion for listing	(B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

Like its neighbour, the Walker Building, Sutton House was designed by influential architects Atkinson, Powell & Conrad and constructed in 1928. It was built for optometry supplier John Sutton, who operated his business from Sutton House until at least 1952. The top floor was built for use as a private residence and the ground floor shops have been tenanted by a variety of retailers over the years. With elements of both the Spanish Mission and Georgian Revival styles of interwar architecture, this three-storey building is quite distinctive and unique, as the construction of small retail premises with a private residence above had become quite uncommon by the 1920s.

History

Sutton House is a three-storey commercial building, with a top-floor residence and substantial basement, erected in 1928 for John Sutton. A building of similar, though smaller, proportions – the Walker Building – was constructed concurrently on the adjacent allotment (129 George Street). Prior to the construction of Sutton House, the site was occupied by a nineteenth century building, which was used predominantly for commercial purposes by a bootmaker, optician instrument maker and other trades. In 1924 J. R. Sutton, an optometry supplier, began trading from the nineteenth century premises.

J. R. Sutton's optometry supply business first began trading in 1918-19 from 158 Elizabeth Street. At this time Sutton was only the second optometry supplier to be listed in the *Queensland Post Office Directory* (POD). Optometry had only recently developed a professional identity in both Brisbane and Australia in this period. In 1890, for example, there were only a handful of "opticians" listed in the POD (the term "optometrist" was increasingly used from the 1910s onward). The first course of technical education for optometry in Australia was offered in Brisbane in 1909. The first national body representing optometry in Australia was formed in 1918. The development of a professional identity through education and formation of professional associations make this a critical period for optometry in Australia and, in particular, Brisbane. By the 1920s, there were over sixty

optometrists operating in Brisbane. As an optometry supplier, Sutton was clearly able to benefit from this growth in the industry.

The general commercial outlook of Brisbane at the beginning of the 1920s was also characterised by a general sense of optimism about the future. Following the depression of the 1890s and a severe drought in 1902, economic conditions in Queensland steadily improved and by 1908 economic growth was “striking”.¹ The Queensland economy contracted during World War One and only slowly recovered in the immediate postwar years. By 1920, however, economic conditions had once more improved, though they did not reach the same level of growth experienced prior to World War One.² Nonetheless, business confidence in the period from 1920-26 was high. Thus, a period of renewed economic growth and the professional development of the optometry industry undoubtedly contributed to a confident outlook for Sutton, enabling his purchase of the site at 133 George Street and his eventual construction of Sutton House.

Sutton continued to operate from Elizabeth Street until 1923, when he moved to 131-133 George Street. Sutton purchased the nineteenth century building and land in 1924. He also purchased the adjacent allotment, which was subsequently sold to C. J. Walker in the same year. Sutton traded from the original building until construction began on Sutton House in 1928.

Both Sutton and Walker appear to have worked closely together on plans for the construction of new buildings on their respective sites. Both Sutton and Walker received building approval from the Brisbane City Council on the same day in July 1928. The same architectural firm, Atkinson, Powell & Conrad, was commissioned for both buildings, which were constructed by the same builder, John Hutchinson (founder of Hutchinson Builders, currently one of the State’s largest building contractors). Both buildings record 1928 as the establishment date. Given the similarity between the two buildings and the coincidence of building approval, it is reasonable to suggest that both Sutton and Walker discussed the need for their new premises, arrived at an agreement to use the same architect and both approved the similar style of the two buildings. Their unique co-operation makes the two buildings an unusual set, both aesthetically and historically, of commercial interwar buildings in the CBD.

The final cost of Sutton House was £7,200.

Sutton House is an amalgam of architectural styles. The ground floor is a typical street-level shop front; the second floor is Georgian Revival in character and the third floor residence represents the Spanish Mission style, which became popular in residential homes in Queensland in the interwar period. Indeed, Atkinson, Powell & Conrad were especially noted for their use of Spanish Mission style in Queensland. Moreover, the construction of an above-shop residence in the CBD was unusual by the 1920s. Such residences were much more common, particularly amongst artisans, prior to the twentieth century. This aspect of the building is thus particularly rare in the CBD.

The architectural firm of Atkinson, Powell & Conrad operated from 1927 to 1931. Henry Wallace Atkinson attended the first course for technical education as an architect offered in Queensland in 1881. Both Atkinson and Lange Leopold Powell were also members of the first Queensland Board of Architects, formed following the passing of the *Architects Act* of 1928.³ These two architects were thus part of the first generation of Queensland-trained architects in a time of critical reflection about the nature of architecture in Queensland and the establishment of a local, professional identity. Together, the firm was responsible for a number of significant buildings in Brisbane, including the Dunlop Rubber Co. Building (1927), “Craigston” (1927) and the Tristrams’ Factory (1928).

Sutton continued to operate from the building until at least 1952, whilst the shop fronts on the ground floor attracted a range of businesses, including cafés, hairdressers and newsagents. In 1937, J. A. Sutton, possibly John Sutton’s son, began operating from the building as an optometrist. In 1940, yet another optometrist began

trading from the building. Sutton died in 1955 and ownership of the property passed to members of his family. The Queensland Government purchased the site in 1985. The building continues to be known as Sutton House, with the title and date of establishment still visible on the parapet of the building. Indeed, in 1991 an optometrist still occupied one of the ground-level shops, thus maintaining a tangible link with the original owner of the building, and the industry, from the early 1900s.

As with most retail premises within the CBD, Sutton House has undergone a number of internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different commercial tenants. A new staircase was built in 1952 and alterations were carried out on Sutton's shop in the same year. Alterations were undertaken to J. A. Sutton's shop in 1964 and 1972. Another alteration, this time to the third floor, was carried out in 1982.

Patricia and Siobhan Cosgrave featured Sutton House as an interesting historical building in their 1989 publication *The Brisbane Year Book*. The Brisbane History Group also identified Sutton House 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*. In 2006, Sutton House was sold for \$2.2 million dollars, with *The Courier Mail* making special note of what it described as "the sale of a historic building in Brisbane's CBD".⁴

Description

Sutton House is a three-storey narrow frontage commercial building, with a top-floor residence and substantial basement. It is an amalgam of architectural styles with a strong influence, particularly in the top floor loggia, of the Inter-War Spanish Mission style. The building has a contained symmetric form with a prominent transverse gable roof.

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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:

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as a rare example of a small, CBD commercial building incorporating a top-floor residence.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its elegant proportions, contained symmetric form and unique composition with reference to both Spanish Mission and Georgian Revival styles.

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 its small scale is an unusual example of the commercial work of the influential architectural firm of Atkinson, Powell & Conrad.

References

1. Glen Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1973, p. 134
2. *Ibid*, p. 190.
3. William Job, *The Building of Brisbane 1828-1940*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2002, pp. 23, 25-6
4. *The Courier Mail*, 20 October 2006, P. 73
5. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website, post-1946 building cards
6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
7. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map 1913
8. Brisbane History Group, *Walking Tours – Brisbane's Commercial Heritage 1900-1940*, Brisbane, Brisbane History Group, 2002
9. Cosgrove, Patricia & Cosgrove, Siohban, *The Brisbane Year Book*, Sydney, Collins, 1989
10. Coutts, J.V.D. (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland, 1927-1928*

11. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of Title and other records
 12. Greenwood, Gordon, *Brisbane 1859-1959 – A History of Local Government*, Parramatta, The Cumberland Press, 1959
 13. Job, William, *The Building of Brisbane 1828-1940*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2002
 14. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
 15. John Oxley Library, newspaper clippings files
 16. Lewis, Glen, *A History of the Ports of Queensland: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1973
 17. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 12, 1951
 18. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
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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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