

Heritage Citation



Swift's Building (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 201 Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Office building, Shop/s
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Free Style
Lot plan	L1_RP866213
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2010
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Masonry
People/associations	Eaton and Bates (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic

The building known as Swift's Building was built for owners Scott and Atkins in 1905 by Sydney-trained architects Eaton and Bates on what was the site of Thornhill's saddlery. It was the location of Swift and Grice's jewellery store until the partnership split in 1907, and the building was sublet to other tenants, including Crease's Pharmacy.

History

One of the earliest known uses of this site was as Thornhill's Saddlery and Harness Making Establishment. According to the early titles, William Thornhill first took possession of the site in July, 1872. In March 1876 Thornhill closed the shop, auctioned off his stock and rented the premises to grocers. In August, 1876 however, fire totally destroyed the store. Thornhill offered to sell 10 feet on the corner of each street to the Brisbane Municipal Council for £300, for the purpose of widening the streets, however the offer does not appear to have been accepted.

William Thornhill repeatedly applied for liquor licenses to run his residence on the corner of Wickham Street and Brunswick Street as an inn, but was refused. Thornhill died in 1885 and his widow advertised the lease of a newly-completed corner house and shop in June 1894. This two-storey timber building can be seen in John Oxley Library photographs. An 1898 photograph shows this building, which housed the Australian Loan Office, still existed in that year. Records indicate that the Australian Loan Office still occupied the site as late as 1900.

Rapid expansion in the 1890s meant that by the early twentieth century, the meeting of Brunswick and Wickham Streets, known as the 'Valley Corner' or 'Valley Junction' was arguably the most important site in Fortitude Valley. It was the main centre for arrivals to the Valley, with the tram terminus on the corner, and Brunswick Street railway station not far away. It was also the closest corner to T.C. Beirne's and James McWhirters' former drapers' stores, now expanding into large department stores and increasing the appeal of the Valley for visitors. The desirability of the corner was recognised by McWhirters, which had plans for occupying the Valley Corner with a large building as early as 1900. The grand building of the Bank of New South Wales was located on one corner, with Overells, another large drapery, next door. John Hunter's 'Monster' Boot Company was on another corner and the Prince Consort Hotel not far from the corner. However, there was no prominent building on the corner formerly owned by Thornhill, with the premises leased to small retailers or traders including hairdressers, jewellers, butchers and dressmakers.

The property was offered for sale in 1903 and purchased by station owners Robert and Clara Scott, of Hornet Bank Station and Frederick Atkins, of Coorada Station. The Brisbane Courier reported the intention of the new owners to pull down the Thornhill Buildings and erect a row of business places as soon as the old lease expired. Title to the property passed to the new owners in February 1904, but it was not until October that plans for the new building were submitted for approval. In November tenders were called for the erection of an extensive two-storey brick building for shops and offices on the corner of Brunswick and Wickham Streets, by Messrs. Eaton and Bates, architects. Sydney-trained architects George T. Eaton and Albert E. Bates had established a partnership in Rockhampton in 1894 and set up six branches in central Queensland before establishing a main branch in Brisbane in 1902. Other works listed on the State Heritage Register include the Exchange Hotel in Laidley (1902), Masonic Halls in Rockhampton (1901) and Mount Morgan (1903), Schotia Place in Rockhampton (1899), St Brigid's Convent in Red Hill (1902-3) and Cremorne in Hamilton (1905-6).

However, progress of the new building was hindered by the possibility of land resumption. Debates had commenced in the newspapers and within the Brisbane Municipal Council in 1904, but in 1905 the issue became much more contentious. The development of large buildings and major transport systems on narrow streets had

created a 'notoriously dangerous' corner for vehicles and pedestrians. With the demolition of the old Thornhill building, the block seemed to be ideal for purchase by the Council to widen the corner for traffic, but the purchase did not occur. A subsequent recommendation was made that the land be purchased before the foundations for the new building were laid, in April 1905, but this opportunity was missed as well. After a series of delays, and with construction of the new building just about to start, Isles, Love and Co (on behalf of the Scotts and Atkins) reached an agreement with the Council on 19 April 1905 for the resumption of part of the land, for £1800. The amount was controversial, seen as much too high for the amount of land taken, but took into account the loss of two upstairs rooms, part of the downstairs shop, tenants and architects' fees. By September 1905 resumption of the land had gone ahead, as Valley residents and representatives turned their attention to the north-western and south-western blocks. However in March 1906 the Council suggested that its finances were not such that the project could proceed.

Despite the loss of part of the block and proposed building, the two storey brick building was completed in 1905 and leased in August. The resumption even added an unusual and noteworthy feature to the building: a rounded shop-front with a curved footpath awning, which was later replaced by a cantilevered awning.

The literature available indicates that the building has been a significant landmark in the streetscape of the Fortitude Valley since its completion. The building featured in a series of early twentieth century coloured postcards of Brisbane. In 1910 the author of an early history of Queensland described the building as having an 'imposing exterior' and an 'attractive façade'. He said:

The visitor to Brisbane should make a point of visiting this well known corner. The impression created by the imposing exterior is only heightened when one enters.

The building became known as Swift's, with the name 'Swift and Grice' displayed prominently on the building between 1905 and 1910. A lease had been granted to jeweller Patrick Swift, as well as pawn-broker Joseph Rosenberg, watchmaker Joseph Antonini and dentist Ralph Grimes.

Patrick Swift and Joseph Hendry Grice, jewellery importers, had been established in Brunswick Street, opposite T.C. Beirne, since approximately 1902. The business was a successful one, allowing Swift and Grice to sponsor a road race for cyclers, and to provide trophies and prizes for a variety of local competitions. Swift and Grice also contributed to musical endeavours, with Grice establishing the Valley Concert Band, later the Brisbane Municipal Concert Band, on its premises in 1904. Swift and Grice announced their removal to the Valley Corner with a sale in November 1905. The rounded shop windows on a prominent corner allowed Swift and Grice to display their wares to their best advantage.

Grice left the partnership in 1907, establishing his own business in Queen Street. Grice later became the Mayor of Southport. Patrick Swift continued the business in the building on the Valley Corner until 1919, adding workrooms on the Wickham Street side of the building in 1918. The business, which had been registered as Swift Limited, relocated to Queen Street in 1919.

In 1915, Crease chemists leased the building and purchased it in 1922, subject to a mortgage to the original owners. In the new premises Crease enjoyed a 'remarkably fast' growth, according to the Brisbane Courier. Christmas in the Valley was particularly popular, and Crease presented an 'excellent display of suitable Christmas presents', and carried on a tradition of presenting customers with Old English lavender water on Christmas Eve.

Crease rented the remaining shops to other businesses, including some of the original lessees. In 1922 and 1923, Crease transferred 6.94 perches to Annie Antonini and Bertram Samuel Worford, with small portions for easements, reducing the original 13.88 perch allotment to 4.94 perches. Other unregistered lessees included Wallace Bishop, who added this Valley branch to his renowned jewellery business. A fire in September 1930, believed to have started in Crease's dispensary, destroyed an estimated £3000 worth of stock and necessitated

the renovation of the interior. Although nobody had been hurt in the fire, a workman was killed during the renovations when he fell from scaffolding.

Crease Chemists continued to operate from the building, which became known as Crease's Building, until 1941, when Roush Pharmacy bought the business. However, Crease Ltd and various members of the Crease family continued to own the land and building until 1986, leasing out the offices and shops. The building continues to house to a number of tenants providing a variety of goods and services.

Description

The building is of two storeyed brick construction, on a small, heavily truncated corner site. The façade is divided by pilasters into bays corresponding with the five chord corner truncation, with the transition at the main corner accentuated by narrow oriel windows surmounted by domes.

The upper floor windows have three centred arches with the fanlights divided into roundels by glazing bars. The parapet and balcony have Italianate balustrading with bold horizontal string courses.

The distinctive roofline comprises a parapet of balustrading and round headed decorated pediments, pedestals above the vertical pilasters, and hemi-spherical domes on semi circular arched drums. Behind the parapet is a corrugated iron mansard roof and turrets.

Alterations which have been made to the buildings include removal of the end turret and mansard roofing to the eastern end of the building, addition of a party wall and parapet, replacement of the original post supported bullnosed awning with a suspended awning, changes to the ground floor shopfront and interior, and alterations to windows and exterior colours.

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 confidence in the commercial future of Fortitude Valley in the early twentieth century, which by then was challenging the city centre as the retail hub of Brisbane.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a relatively intact and rare example of Federation Free Style architecture in Brisbane.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a relatively intact example of a Federation Free Style commercial building built in the 1900s.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a fine example of a Federation Free Style building with polychromatic brickwork and fine detailing; and, for its substantial contribution to Brunswick and Wickham Streets from its prominent corner location; and, as one of a number of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that form an historic streetscape along this part of Wickham Street.

References

1. John H.C. McClurg, *Historical Sketches of Brisbane*, Brisbane, Library Board of Queensland and the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, 1975, p. 71. Titles Office Records
2. *Queensland Figaro*, November 1905, p. 18
3. E.J.T. Barton (ed.), *Jubilee History of Queensland*, Brisbane, H.J. Diddams and Co, 1910, p. 281
4. *The Courier*, 1864
5. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1865, 1872, 1874, 1876, 1881, 1886, 1888, 1893, 1898, 1900-5, 1910, 1915-6, 1923, 1927-8, 1930-1
6. *The Queenslander* 1900

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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 April 2025)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane