

Heritage Citation

Thorpe's Residence

Key details

Addresses	At 20 Victoria Street, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000
Type of place	House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Georgian
Lot plan	L22_RP10513
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004 Date of Citation — June 2015
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Masonry
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific; (D) Representative

This house was constructed circa 1876 for Abraham Gorham Thorpe. It is a rare brick two-storey, nineteenth century cottage, surviving in what was one of Brisbane's earliest suburbs.

History

Spring Hill is one of the earliest residential areas of Brisbane. A windmill was erected on the height of Wickham Terrace in 1829 to process grain for the Moreton Bay penal colony. When Moreton Bay was opened for free settlement in 1842 the Crown offered parcels of land within the town of Brisbane for sale. Land settlement in Spring Hill followed soon after, with surveys, subdivisions and sales from the 1850s. The area was in walking distance of the city and Fortitude Valley, giving it residential appeal. The wealthy were separated from the working class by Spring Hill's topography. Grand houses were built on the ridges for the more well-to-do, while cottages on small allotments for the working class were erected down the slopes towards Hanly's Valley and

Spring Hollow.

Suburban Portion 236 was purchased by John Christian Heussler of Brisbane in December 1858. He paid £65.7s.8d for the portion, two acres and two perches of land running down the slopes of Victoria and Union Streets towards Spring Hollow (now Water Street). He subdivided the land into smaller housing allotments and then offered the land for sale.

Janet Aitken acquired subdivision 22 of Heussler's estate, a 20.25 perch block, in September 1863. She mortgaged the land in 1865 for £120 and the mortgagor, George Harris, took control of the property in October 1866. Harris retained the site until the end of 1872 when Mary Graham, the wife of cabinet-maker James Graham, purchased the site. The Grahams lived in Rogers Street opposite this property, and owned several investment houses in the area. They may have built this house as an investment property but this is unclear.

On 28 November 1873, subdivision 22 was transferred to Abraham Gorham Thorpe. English-born Thorpe had arrived in Brisbane in the 1860s, and took up residence at 'Fairlight', a 150 acre farm on the Great Northern Road. He served on local civic boards in the Cabbage Tree Creek area, including the trust for the Bald Hills cemetery. Ill-health forced him to offer Fairlight for sale in 1873, and by 1874 he resided in this two-storey brick house in Victoria Street.

In the early 1870s a small number of brick buildings were erected in the area around Victoria, Rogers and Leichhardt Streets, including the first building of Brisbane Central State School [600312], Moody's brick cottages [600314] and Thorpe's cottage. The use of brick for these properties was noteworthy. In Spring Hill, timber houses were constructed on small allotments for working class occupants as the suburb grew in the nineteenth century. This led to concerns about the ease with which fire and disease could spread. Brick properties helped to mitigate the risk, but were more expensive to build. Thorpe's choice of brick may reflect his status as a relatively well-to-do landowner. The stone for the house's porphyry base was likely taken from the quarry in nearby Quarry Street.

Thorpe's cottage stands out amongst its neighbours as the only two-storey residence. Residences in Brisbane tended to be single-storey, single-family dwellings. Second storeys were generally only added to duplexes and terraces, to offset the small space on the ground floor. Multi-tenanted dwellings were rare in Brisbane but were built in small numbers in high density suburbs like Spring Hill, and Thorpe may have intended to turn his property into a high density dwelling. His 20-perch site was large for Spring Hill, where houses were often built on eight or nine perches, and the cottage's position on the edge of the lot leaves room for a second house on the site, which was obviously never completed. The two-storey style of Thorpe's cottage does not appear to have been replicated elsewhere.

Advertisements for the lease of the brick house began in 1879. The property had a number of attractions for potential lessees. It was situated near the appealing upper slopes of Spring Hill, a short walk downhill from Leichhardt Street. Services were nearby, including the recently-opened Leichhardt Street State School, the commercial district along Leichhardt Street and a tram line. The six-roomed house had 'every convenience' and its position on the edge of the site left space to the side and rear of the property for tenants' use.

Despite his poor health, Thorpe took over John Crowther's estate agency in 1882. He was subsequently listed in Post Office Directories as a house agent and offered a number of other properties for sale through the 1880s. Thorpe moved house regularly, possibly as part of his occupation, before eventually retiring to Nundah.

By 1883 William Holberton was residing in the house, which was then number 7 Victoria Street. On 5 December 1887 the property was transferred to William Beer Holberton. Holberton, an accountant, resided in the house

through the 1880s and early 1890s. In 1892 he began to run a school from the house, but ownership of the property returned to Thorpe in June of that year. Thorpe retained ownership until his death on 25 October 1893.

The house was slow to sell, and was held by Thorpe's estate trustees until 1895. In the interim the house was tenanted; rental properties were in high demand in inner-city suburbs like Spring Hill and Petrie Terrace, which had become the most highly populated suburbs in Brisbane by the 1890s. In 1898 new owner Bentley Rutkin moved into the house with his family, and lived there for the next ten years.

The 'comfortable brick residence' was advertised for sale in 1908 when the Rutkin family left the state. Subsequent owners leased the property, either as individual rooms in the family occupied residence, or as a whole house.

Demand for rental properties in Spring Hill declined in the twentieth century. By the 1920s Spring Hill's residential desirability had waned, and it was seen as run-down, neglected and crime-ridden inner-city suburb. Despite the suburb's poor reputation, Thorpe's cottage was convenient for working class families, being close to Brisbane Central State School, Bedford Playground and the Leichhardt Street shops. The owners of Thorpe's cottage continued to lease the three bedroom residence through the 1920s and 1930s, highlighting its proximity to the school, Valley and city. It has been owner occupied since the 1940s.

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 a brick 1870s house constructed in Spring Hill, one of Brisbane's earliest suburbs.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as it is an uncommon brick built, two-storey cottage surviving in Brisbane.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

as a brick house constructed in the 1870s, surrounded by relatively undisturbed land.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a two-storey brick house built circa 1874 and used as a residence and tenanted periodically.

References

1. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website
2. Brisbane City Council aerial photographs, 1946, 2012
3. Brisbane City Council, City Architecture & Heritage Team, heritage citations
4. Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Board detail plan, 1914
5. Brisbane City Council's Central Library, local history sheets
6. Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Entries on the Queensland Heritage Register, Brisbane Central State School [600312], Moody's Cottages [600314]
7. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
8. Fisher, Rod, *Spring Hill Heritage Tour: St Pauls to Gregory Terrace*, Kelvin Grove: Brisbane History Group, 1993
9. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Picture Queensland
10. National Library of Australia, Trove newspapers, *Brisbane Courier*, *Telegraph*, *Courier Mail*, *Queenslander*, *Sunday Mail*
11. National Trust of Queensland, *Spring Hill: A report by the National Trust of Queensland* (no date)
12. Real Estate.com.au (website), 20 Victoria Street Spring Hill floorplan
13. Queensland Government, *Queensland Pioneers Index 1829-1889*, (Brisbane: Department of Justice and Attorney General, 2000)

14. Queensland Places: Spring Hill (website)
 15. *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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