

Heritage Citation



Tranberg House

Key details

Addresses	At 235 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Shop/s
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L3_RP9773; L2_RP9773
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2010
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Face brick
People/associations	Francis Richard Hall (Architect)

Tranberg House was designed for Charles Tranberg by his brother in law, Francis Hall, and constructed in 1928. The Tranbergs had run commercial businesses in and around Brunswick Street from the 1870s, including a fuel depot operating on the site of Tranberg House in the 1910s and early 1920s. The property was constructed during the Valley's peak period as a commercial hub and was built as an investment property, leased to various tenants. Along with its neighbour, the See War and Co building, it provides provide an attractive façade along this section of Brunswick Street.

History

The prosperous 1920s witnessed a boom in the Valley's commercial and industrial growth. In this decade Duncan's Hill, which was opposite All Hallows' and blocked access from the City to the Valley, was cut again, opening the Valley up even more to the rest of Brisbane. All Brisbane trams passed the famous Valley Corner at the intersection of Brunswick and Wickham Street and brought thousands of shoppers to the Valley. Similarly, the railway station at Brunswick Street which had been opened in 1890 provided much greater access to the major retailers and attractions of the Valley.

Tranberg House was constructed for Charles Tranberg junior (1868-1944) towards the end of this boom period, in 1928. It was designed by renowned architect Francis Hall, who was Tranberg's brother-in-law. The new building was featured in the Building and Construction section of the Daily Mail in July 1928. It was built on the site where Tranberg had run his fuel business for the preceding eighteen years, and its location, almost directly opposite the Brunswick Street railway station, made it easily accessible. It was also a short walk from the Valley Corner. It was leased to a variety of tenants, including Brisbane Estates, Brisbane Supply Co and Best Bets (Qld), as well as a lease of part of the land and building to eminent Valley furnishers Whincup and Company.

The Tranbergs' association with Fortitude Valley began when Charles Henry Tranberg, senior, and wife Sarah moved to Queensland in the late 1860s, and their first son, Charles Henry junior, was born in the Valley in 1868. Tranberg was a Danish emigrant who worked as a trader between Brisbane and Ipswich before commencing a grocery store in Brunswick Street in the 1880s. The store was located near Leichhardt Street, although not on the same site as Tranberg House. Tranberg carried on his grocery business until it was taken over by one of his sons, James, in 1896. In June 1900 the Brunswick Street premises was afflicted by an outbreak of the plague, and James died of the disease in July. He was the second of Tranberg senior's sons to die prematurely: teenaged Samuel Haslett Tranberg had drowned while swimming in Moreton Bay in 1888.

Charles Henry Tranberg junior appears in the electoral rolls in the 1890s in the Toombul ward. In 1897 he was a caretaker at 'Monte Video' in the Swan Hill estate (now State-listed 'Boothville' in Windsor), and in 1898 a clerk, residing with Mr and Mrs FR Hall in Clayfield. In 1902 he married Alice Ruth Green, and the Tranbergs resided in various locations around Brisbane, though not far from Fortitude Valley. In 1906, Alice Ruth Tranberg and Charles Henry, junior, were residing in 226 Harcourt street, New Farm. Charles was an insurance agent, and Alice undertook domestic duties. The addition of the Fortitude Valley railway line in the 1890s had assisted the growth and popularity of the Valley.

Charles Tranberg senior continued to influence the progress of the Valley in the early twentieth century, although the grocery store had been closed. As well as being the owner of multiple properties behind Brunswick street, Tranberg was among several prominent Valley residents, including Beirne, McWhirter, Mayor Proe and Frank McDonnell, who presented the Commissioner for Railways with a petition to establish the Valley Markets on the Brunswick street siding in 1905. The market was intended to take advantage of the fresh vegetables produced by agricultural and small-crop areas in the Valley. It would add to the attractions of the Valley, which by 1905 was one of the primary places to shop in Brisbane, but the scheme was short-lived.

By 1910 Charles Tranberg junior had established a fuel merchant and commission agency business with R. Green in Brunswick Street, and the Tranbergs were residing in 17 Esther Street, behind the fuel yard. Tranberg's partnership with Green dissolved in February 1910 and Tranberg carried on the business in his own name.

The position of Tranberg's fuel yard was central to his success. Growing trade had outstripped accommodation in the rail sidings at Brunswick Street, and the fuel traders had complained to the Commissioner for Railways in 1904 that this caused significant delays for the merchants waiting to unpack their trucks. The fuel trade was dependent on the railways, and for merchants without a depot near the siding, it was not necessarily a profitable trade. The practice of selling wood from transport trucks, to save money on cartage, was frowned upon, and profit margins were so tight that the further from the siding a depot was, the less likely its owner would break even, let alone make money. Fuel depots located near major railway sidings had a significant advantage, such as Warmington's at the intersection of Saul and Skew Streets (near Roma Street), and Tranberg's, adjoining Brunswick Street. Tranberg's fuel depot, supplying firewood, coal and coke, as well as timber supplies for house stumps, split posts, sails and palings, was one of the largest of its kind in Brisbane.

Tranberg's business was so successful that while the Brisbane Fuel Merchants' Association were insisting that the 'unfair and ruinous price of firewood inflicted on the firewood vendors' made business almost impossible, Tranberg purchased subdivision 2 of the Brunswick Street property. Subdivision 3, comprised of 9.62 perches and containing two brick shops and with a 20 foot frontage to Brunswick Street, was advertised for sale four years later in March 1924. The Tranbergs also acquired title to this lot. Both small properties were the results of the whittled-down estates of Robert Cribb and Lot Randle. In April 1928, the Tranbergs took out a mortgage from the Commercial Bank of Australia Ltd, presumably to finance the construction of his new building.

The designer of Tranberg House, Francis Richard Hall, was the eldest son of prominent Brisbane architect John Hall. Hall had become a principal in his father's practice, John Hall and Son at the age of 21, following John Hall's death in 1883. In 1884 he married Anna Katherina Tranberg. From 1896 to 1913 Hall was partnered with Robin Dods, and the firm Hall and Dods was one of the most influential and productive in Brisbane. Partnerships with other architects followed, though Hall as a solo practitioner designed two buildings listed on the Queensland Heritage register: MacArthur Chambers in Queen St (1931-4) [600147] and Wickham House in Spring Hill (1924) [601180]. Hall was also practising alone when he designed Tranberg House.

G.E. Day and Son successfully tendered to build the 'attractive addition to the Valley Shopping Centre'. The area was indeed a successful commercial precinct. On one side was the former See War and Company building and warehouse, now in the possession of the State and run as a butchery. On the other side, successful paint supply company Enoch Baker had hired Richard Gailey to erect additions and alterations to its brick warehouse.

The 'just completed' Tranberg House was advertised with two new shops to let, as well as about 1,200 square feet of office space, partitioned with good light and air. Three shops were on the ground floor, with offices above and a parking garage below. Built of brick, with concrete foundations, it was 'of pleasing design' with face bricks, compo finishes and 'attractive shop fronts'. Tranberg House first appears in the Post Office Directories in 1929.

Its position near the railway was now an advantage for the passengers who would disembark at the station on the opposite side of Brunswick Street.

Tranberg House was let to numerous tenants from its completion as Brunswick Street continued to be an appealing commercial location. The produce markets scheme, which had failed at the turn of the century, was revived. A 'Paddy's Markets' building was approved for Brunswick St in 1929, a few shops removed from Tranberg House, before relocating to a purpose-built structure on Wickham St in 1932. Tranberg's fuel depot had given way to Tranberg's parking garage, accessed from Esther Street. The advent of new fuels like gas and electricity had 'knocked the stuffing' out of old-time wood depots and by 1932, while some continued in the metropolitan area, many had closed. Tranberg revived his fuel depot from 1934-1936, in Esther Street, but closed it again and moved to Virginia.

After the deaths of Charles and Alice in 1944 and 1945 respectively, Tranberg House was transferred to their son Alfred. The building continued to be let, with civil engineers A.S. Macdonald, Wagner and Priddle of Tranberg Building advertising for tenders for a coal handling plant in Gladstone Harbour in 1951. In 1956 Tranberg Pty Ltd was registered as a company and owned the premises from 1960 until 1971 when Little and Associates Pty Ltd gained title. Subsequent proprietors include Paddy's Markets and Lomfield Pty Ltd.

The most striking features of this building are the elaborate parapet and the verticled fenestration, which compliments the adjoining building. Together they provide an attractive façade along this section of Brunswick Street.

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 it reflects the boom period in the Valley during the 1920s.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance for the contribution it and its neighbouring building (at 225 Brunswick Street) make to the streetscape of this part

of Brunswick Street.

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 connection with designer Francis Hall, the brother-in-law of owner Charles Tranberg.

References

1. Letter from Charles Tranberg's son to F. Brown, 11 June 1968. F.Brown Manuscripts, Box 4. John Oxley Library Manuscript Collection
2. *Post Office Directories* 1908-1930
3. Queensland Land Titles Office Records
4. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994
5. Queensland State Archives, Companies Index 1863-1959
6. *The Queenslander*, 1888
7. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1898, 1902, 1904-6, 1908-10, 1917, 1924, 1928-9, 1932
8. *The Daily Mail*, 1928
9. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1951

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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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