

Heritage Citation



Walton's Chambers (former)

Key details

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| Also known as | Walton's Building |
| Addresses | At 173 Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006 |
| Type of place | Office building, Shop/s |
| Period | World War I 1914-1918 |
| Style | Free Style |
| Lot plan | L1_RP9553; L3_RP9532; L5_RP9530 |
| Key dates | Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — May 2017 |
| Construction | Walls: Masonry |

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| People/associations | H. and D.F. Roberts (Builder); Hall and Dods (Architect) |
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| Criterion for listing | (A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic |
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William Walton established his furniture business in Wickham Street on the adjacent site in 1889. This was converted into the Melba Continuous Picture Theatre in 1913. In 1909 Walton purchased the block on the corner of Wickham and Duncan Streets and in 1915 had this brick shop and office building constructed on the site. Eminent Brisbane architects Hall and Dods designed the new building, known as Walton's Building and Walton's Chambers. Tenanted from 1916, the property reflects the appeal of Fortitude Valley for commercial development and the success of Walton's business in the early twentieth century.

History

Fortitude Valley was established as a township in the 1840s when John Dunmore Lang's Scottish immigrants landed in the area and settled on York's Hollow. Separated from the main business centre by Duncan's Hill (near what is now All Hallows' school), the Valley developed as an independent township, with a small commercial precinct along Ann Street. By the 1860s some shops had extended to Wickham Street, though Ann Street remained the primary thoroughfare. The corner of Wickham and Duncan Streets was occupied by commerce from the 1870s, but the site's occupants experienced some adversities. Produce stores and a dwelling established on the site were destroyed by a fire in 1880. Newly erected premises, this time housing undertakers, were gutted in another blaze in December 1896. Further misfortune followed in 1898, when wooden paving laid over a section of Wickham Street collapsed and access to the site was blocked by 'sixty yards of swamp'.

After the second fire the site was leased to businessman William Walton. Walton was already established in the area, running a wire mattress manufacturing business on the adjacent property on Wickham Street. Unlike his unfortunate neighbours, Walton experienced great success in the Valley. He commissioned a new building in 1889 and expanded his business in the 1890s to include furniture sales. His property was slightly damaged by the 1896 fire, but Walton's insurance covered the loss. In 1897, after the Wickham and Duncan Street corner was cleared, he shifted his second-hand goods branch to the site.

Walton's expansion coincided with the Valley's progress in the late nineteenth century. Road and rail transport to the city was improved with further cuttings to Duncan's Hill and the opening the Brunswick Street railway station. Following devastating floods which affected Brisbane in the 1890s, large drapery businesses began to move into the relatively dry Wickham and Brunswick Streets. Within ten years the Valley was a significant shopping district, with firms like TC Beirne, McWhirters and Overells drawing large crowds to the area. Business premises began to spring up in the surrounding streets, as investors took advantage of the appeal of the so-called 'Valley Corner'.

The Duncan Street corner was slower to develop, but experienced dramatic growth in the early twentieth century. 'Situated in a quiet part of Wickham Street,' wrote the Telegraph in 1902, 'one would almost wonder how a large establishment such as that of Mr William Walton could manage to exist let alone thrive.' By 1905 the newspaper was congratulating him on his foresight in choosing the site, which 'has been abundantly borne out by the experience of the past few years, the locality having rapidly increased in importance, until becoming, as it

undoubtedly is, about the busiest centre in Queensland.’

Retailers Foy and Gibson opened their new shop in Wickham Street opposite Duncan Street in June 1903, and trams and buses had conveyed full loads of passengers to the Valley to investigate the new building. With Foy and Gibson bringing customers to the Duncan Street corner, owners of surrounding allotments had grand commercial premises constructed, with shops and offices to lease to small business owners. These included King Edward Chambers (1905) and Carrington Chambers (1909) (both still extant and listed on the heritage overlay).

Walton continued to lease the Duncan Street corner before finally purchasing the block in 1909. In 1911 Walton’s business was taken over by his sons, renamed Walton Brothers and relocated to Brunswick Street. Walton’s first Wickham Street property was converted to house a picture theatre in 1913. It was initially proposed to call the Continuous Picture Theatre “The Lyric”, however it opened as the “Melba Continuous Picture Theatre”. The property on the corner of Duncan Street was leased to tenants, but after improvements to Duncan Street in the early 1910s, Walton began work to enhance the site. In 1915 he had plans approved for brick offices and shops on the corner of Wickham and Duncan Streets. The offices and shops were to be leased; despite the war, demand for rental premises in the area remained high.

The architects engaged for the project were Hall and Dods, one of Brisbane’s most eminent architectural firms. Francis Hall and Robin Dods had established their partnership in 1896 and were in great demand during the 1900s. Hall and Dods made a significant contribution to the architectural record of Brisbane, including the Mater Misericordiae Private Hospital and the first part of its public hospital; parts of the General Hospital; the AMP and Bank of NSW buildings; the Wool Store at Bulimba; St Brigid’s at Red Hill; and St John’s Cathedral. They were also called upon by Fortitude Valley retailers. Their Valley designs included alterations to Overell and Sons’ drapery (1898) and a warehouse for TC Beirne. They also designed King Edward Chambers and Carrington Chambers across Duncan Street from Walton’s site.

Walton’s old buildings were removed from the site in late 1915, and contractors H and DF Roberts, a well-known firm in Brisbane, began work on the new property. The contractors advertised for carpenters, fixers, bricklayers, ironworkers and plasterers from October 1915 to April 1916. The building was significantly longer on the Duncan Street frontage, about 126ft (38m) to Wickham Street’s 38ft (11m). Shop windows were constructed along both frontages on the ground floor, making the most of the building’s corner position. Offices on the upper floor were more private but still ‘light and airy’, appealing to medical practitioners and dressmakers. The building was also fitted with gas and electric lights.

Advertisements for the lease of the offices and shops, known as ‘Walton’s Building’ or ‘Walton’s Chambers’, began in July 1916. In addition to tailors and medical clinics, lessees of the building included Kodak, the Ford Motor Dealers and the Bank of Queensland. Less savoury tenants were a proprietor of a clinic who was convicted of falsely holding himself out as a medical practitioner and a clerk who was arrested on the first day of his tenancy for running a betting-shop. Despite this the building well-populated and in subsequent years the chambers was home to tailors, milliners, a salon and the Queensland Women’s Club.

Following Walton’s death in 1937 the Wickham Street property passed to his family. The ‘good two-storied Brick Building’ with its six ground floor shops was offered for sale in 1946. Purchaser Jean McGregor-Lowndes also bought Walton’s other Wickham Street property, the cinema then operating as the Civic Theatre. She retained both buildings until 1981. In 1983 Walton’s Chambers passed to new owners and was converted to a restaurant. The building was altered externally to match Chinatown, created in this section of Duncan Street in the 1980s.

Description

The building is symmetrical, two storeyed and of painted brick construction.

A small cantilevered balcony occupies the central section of the upper floor separated by flat pilasters from two flanking bays, each containing a tall narrow window opening with a decorative flat key stoned lintel. Balcony access is provided by two pairs of French doors and fanlights flanking two narrow windows, all separated by narrow brick piers. The balcony balustrade is wrought iron with alternating panels of vertical balusters and narrow diagonal panels. The balcony roof is slate with hipped ends, and is supported on decorative brackets.

A brick parapet surmounts a bold corbelled cornice, with circular moulded medallions to the end panels and twin moulded balusters to each side of the central panel. The parapet has a flat corbelled capping, with moulded urns above the twin balusters.

Alterations have been confined to the ground floor shop fronts, awning, and external colour scheme.

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 an office and shop building erected as an investment property for William Walton during a boom period in Fortitude Valley in the early twentieth century.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its austere and unusual architecture; 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. Brisbane City Council aerial photographs, 1946, 2012
 2. Brisbane City Council City Architecture and Heritage Team, citations
 3. Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Board detail plan, 1914
 4. Brisbane City Council, Properties on the Web, Building Cards
 5. Brisbane City Council building register, 1914-1920
 6. Department of Natural Resources, Certificates of Title
 7. McKellar's Map, 1895
 8. Mahlstedt & Son. City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey. 1951
 9. National Library of Australia's Trove website, *The Brisbane Courier*, *The Telegraph*, *The Queenslander*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Sunday Mail*
 10. Queensland Post Office Directories
 11. Thurlow, Ray. Administrator, Fortitude Valley Revisited (Facebook)
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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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