



## Heritage Citation



### Axan

### Key details

#### Addresses

At 508 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Type of place</b>         | Flat building   |
| <b>Period</b>                | World War II 1939-1945  |
| <b>Style</b>                 | Composite   |
| <b>Lot plan</b>              | L3_BUP11817; L5_BUP11817; L2_BUP11817; L4_BUP11817; L1_BUP11817; L6_BUP11817    |
| <b>Key dates</b>             | Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2005<br>Date of Citation — November 2003 |
| <b>Construction</b>          | Roof: Terracotta tile;<br>Walls: Masonry - Stucco                               |
| <b>Criterion for listing</b> | (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic                                       |

This purpose-built block of six flats was constructed in 1940 as an investment property for barrister Daniel Casey. Fortitude Valley was a popular area for flats in the interwar period, as it was close to shops, entertainment and public transport. Notably, 'Axan' was built after the 1930s flat-construction boom and so is a rare example of its type and era.

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## History

Located on the northern side of Brunswick Street between Arthur and Harcourt Street, "Axan" is the second recorded structure to be built on the site. "Axan" is a rare example of an intact 1940s flat/apartment building, built after the 1930s boom in flats.

Portions 39 and 40 were originally purchased as part of a five-acre allotment for John Duerdin in December 1853. In circa 1881–82 a shop/dwelling combination was constructed on the site for Jans Stephenson, a tailor previously located in upper Edward Street. Named Therese Cottage, Jans was later listed as a Tobacconist and Confectioner until his death in 1902. Afterwards it housed various businesses up until 1940. These included a tent /tarpaulin manufacturer as well as a dressmaker.

In February 1940 Council gave approval for the demolition of Therese Cottage, and the construction of six modern flats for Daniel Casey, a Barrister located at Kelvin House in Adelaide Street. Contractors Wood & Parnwell were awarded the contract. The building is a two-storeyed rendered masonry structure with mild Spanish Mission/Mediterranean architectural styling references.

The origin of the buildings unusual name is a reflection on the owner's occupation as well as popular literature at the time. In 1937 Tolkien's masterpiece "The Hobbit" was first published. In the book a race of elves spoke a language unique to their own race. This fictional dialect used the word 'Axan' to describe "Law or Commandment". It would appear then that Barrister Daniel Casey read the Hobbit between 1937 and 1940, naming it thus to reflect both his occupation and interest in Tolkien's work.

Purpose designed flat/apartment building emerged as a new form of residential accommodation in Brisbane during the 1920s. Brisbane, in comparison to Sydney and Melbourne, was slow to adopt this form of flat development, however the practice of converting old houses to flats was well established.

Mostly, the blocks presented handsome street facades, predominantly in the fashionable Old English, Spanish Mission or Mediterranean architectural styles. Examples in the Art Deco or Functionalist style were considerably rarer.

Few blocks of flats appear to have been constructed in Brisbane prior to the mid-1920s, with suburbs like New Farm scarcely touched by flat development until the 1930s. Those erected in Brisbane during the interwar period were mostly used as rental investments. The Great Depression fuelled the increase in flat construction, as many found the costs of land and finance too expensive. People turned to rented accommodation in new and well-appointed flats and apartment buildings. This in turn created a strong environment for further investment in flat buildings.

Investors favoured centrally located positions that were close to workplaces, shopping facilities, entertainment and schools and with easy access to public transport. Proximity to a tramline was particularly important, with lines along Brunswick Street terminating at the New Farm ferry. Subsequently, a concentration of flat buildings still exist around the former routes along Brunswick and Merthyr Roads in New Farm.

BCC ordinances, adopted in 1926, included controls over flat developments in both new construction and house conversions. Perhaps the most significant of the ordinances that controlled the flat developments was that 'tenements shall not occupy more than 50% of the allotment of land on which it stands, but when the building is not more than three stories it may occupy two-thirds of the allotment'. As a result, Brisbane's interwar flats rarely exceeded three storeys.

By 1936, the BCC had prepared regulations to control the development of flats, which included; no flats permitted on land with a road of less than 50 links in width; no multiple family building to cover a greater ground area than half the land upon which it is built; multiple-family dwellings to be restricted to two-storeys in height, unless constructed of brick, concrete, or other similar fire-resisting material where height may be increased to three stories. A decline in unit construction occurred after this time. Construction of flats in Brisbane had peaked in 1936-37, with a decline in 1938-39 partly due to the uncertain investment climate generated by threats of war in Europe, and partly due to the refusal of banking and financial institutions.

"Axan" still serves its designed purpose as six flats. It appears to be in good condition and has recently been repainted in sympathetic colours.

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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:

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### Historical

#### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history as it demonstrates the pattern of residential development in Fortitude Valley, and Brisbane, in the early 1940s.

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### 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 highly intact, 1940s purpose-built flat building constructed after the flat-building boom of the 1930s.

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### Aesthetic

#### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance as a substantially intact block of flats that make an important aesthetic contribution to the Brunswick Street streetscape and to the urban fabric of Fortitude Valley, with mild Spanish Mission/Mediterranean and Art Deco architectural features.

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## References

1. Brisbane City Council Sewerage Maps
2. Births, Deaths and Marriages records
3. Certificates of Title.
4. Environmental Protection Agency Cultural Heritage Branch File, *Julius Street Flats 601895*

5. Post Office Directories.
  6. State Library John Oxley Collection
  7. Tolkien and 'Middle Earth' History websites - various
  8. Watson, Donald & Judith McKay 1994, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia
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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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