

Heritage Citation



Beak House (former)

Key details

Also known as	Phipps Corner
Addresses	At 127 Queen Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Office building, Shop/s
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Academic Classical
Lot plan	L2_RP517; L3_RP517; L4_RP517; L1_RP517
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — February 2008
People/associations	James Cowlshaw (Architect)

This building was erected circa 1899. It was built for the Cairncross family, farmers and property investors, who erected a number of buildings at, or close to, this Queen and Albert Street corner during the period 1865-1900. Purchased in 1926 by the owner of the Beak Pastoral Company, the building was later given the name 'Beak House'. It is one of the oldest shop buildings in Brisbane's former retail heart of Queen Street. Because it sits at the centre of the Queen Street retail precinct it has been a familiar landmark to shoppers for more than one hundred years.

History

This building was constructed circa 1899 for the Cairncross family, who were also responsible for the erection of a number of other buildings at, or close to, this corner of Albert and Queen Streets.

After the closure of the Moreton Bay penal colony in 1842, the part of Brisbane that became the Central Business District (CBD) was offered for sale to free settlers. The block of land that includes 127 Queen Street was designated as part of Town Lot 8 of Section 1 and was sold to Archibald Michie on 22 September 1843. Michie, a Sydney resident, acquired a 36-perch block that covered the southeast corner of Albert and Queen Streets. On 1 December 1846, Michie sold Lot 8 to Bulimba farmer and property investor, William Cairncross. Cairncross purchased the adjoining Queen Street lot (No. 9) from Charles Mallard on 31 December 1850.

A series of disastrous fires in 1863-64 destroyed many of the early buildings along Queen Street. This provided an opportunity for redevelopment of the area. In 1865, prominent Brisbane architect James Cowlshaw designed four shops in Albert Street for William Cairncross and five shops in Queen Street for Jane Cairncross (William's daughter). One of these shops was located at 127 Queen Street (though it was numbered differently in this period). It appears this building was demolished in or around 1899 and the current building constructed in its place, also for Jane Cairncross. This development occurred during a period of renewed economic prosperity following the end of a crippling economic depression that afflicted the colony for much of the 1890s. It was also a time of optimism and civic pride as Federation approached. The new building at 127 Queen Street became a familiar landmark for it was located at the centre of Brisbane's major retail precinct that ran along Queen Street between George and Edward Streets.

On 12 December 1922, the property passed from the Cairncross family to John Thomas Phipps. The building became known locally as 'Phipps Corner'. Phipps held the property until 1926 when it was auctioned along with the buildings at 117, 119, 121, 123, 125 Queen Street and 188-196 Albert Street under the banner of the 'Cairncross Estate'. The auction was held in the Phillips Auction Rooms, in Queen Street, on 21 August 1926 but a prior sale on 9 March had sold the 'Phillips Corner' building to Montague Charles Beak, a North Rockhampton grazier and investor and the owner of the Beak Pastoral Company. At the sale, 127 Queen Street was described as "that substantial three-storied building" with the sale price rumoured at £30,000.¹ Beak had the Certificate of Title re-issued in 1949 to his company Beak House Pty Ltd. From that time, the building became known as Beak House.

While this building has had numerous tenancies covering a variety of businesses, such as The Sun newspaper

office (1906-10), it was frequently leased by dentists and photographic studios. The dentists were J. Christensen (1900-02), Fred Huet (1904-10), Walter Coe (1907-12), Edgar Free (1915-20), Roy Rhuebens (1920-23), W. B. McLelland (1928-36 & 1941-?) and R.N. McGroarty (1929-32). The photographers were: Tosca Studios (1900-04), Lynn Art Photo Studios (1905-07), Ada Driver photographer (1910-21), W. E. Evans photographer (1913-21), Marson Studios (1921-28), J. Guilfooy photographer (1922-34) and Noel F. Maitland photographer (1928-33) in partnership with H. Ranald Simmonds.

In 1933, H. Ranald Simmonds established his own photographic studio at 127 Queen Street. This was the beginning of a forty-year association between Ranald Simmonds' Studio and this building. This was a time when private camera ownership in Brisbane was limited and so it was traditional for wedding photographs, baby, family and individual portraits to be taken by a professional photographer at their studio. After World War Two, the company grew into one of the largest and most prominent photographic studios in Brisbane. Sometime after the 1974 Brisbane flood, Ranald Simmonds' Studios moved to Tara House in Elizabeth Street. Ranald Simmonds died in 1980 and his son, Paul, continued the business. He sold Ranald Simmonds Studios in 2004, though the company continues to operate from Woolloongabba.

In 1943, the Black Cat Library and Casket Agency, owned by prominent members of the local Greek community, the Frealeagus family, leased Beak House's ground floor.

Beak House during the occupancy of the Black Cat Casket Agency, circa 1944 (JOL)

The Black Cat Casket Agency became synonymous with this CBD corner site for the next two decades. Its central location enabled the Black Cat to benefit from the increasing popularity of the state government's Golden Casket, which was offering £6.5 million in prize money by 1952 and £10 million by 1960.² Anecdotal evidence indicates that the Black Cat was one of the best-known casket agencies in Brisbane from the 1940s through to the 1970s, having a distinctive parade of black cats on its awning for at least the latter part of this period.

The former Beak House, like most retail premises within the CBD, has undergone many internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different owners and commercial tenants. In particular, ground floors have been changed with all of the CBD's older shops exchanging their narrow doorways and windows for the large glass display windows that became popular after World War One. External changes are also common, particularly the removal of original timber window frames or alterations to a building's façade to give it a more modern appearance. The former Beak House appears to have retained its original façade above the ground floor level.

A major change to the shop front occurred on 6 October 1926, when Maurice Beak applied to the Brisbane City Council for permission to have building contractors P. J. Corbett & Sons make alterations worth £1,600 to the front of the building. The ground floor has also undergone a series of constant alterations according to the requirements of each new tenant. Shop fronts and interiors were altered in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1958, 1964, 1965, 1974, and 1975. The most recent major alterations occurred in 1980, when the entire ground and first floors were converted into the fast food restaurant, Hungry Jacks.

In 1986, the former Beak House was included in the National Trust of Queensland's "The Dream Palace Heritage Walk". It was also featured as an interesting historical building by Patricia and Siobhan Cosgrove in their 1989 publication *The Brisbane Year Book*.

Description

This substantial four-storey ornate building was designed to suit its corner site on Queen and Albert Streets. It has the ordered symmetry and solidity of a Victorian Academic Classical style building with its richly modelled facades, columns, top storey treated as attic with projecting cornice below, parapet with skyline decoration, aedicule and top floor round arch windows.

Change to the shop fronts and interiors have occurred at the ground level, with the constant alterations required by each new tenant.

Above the ground floor level the former Beak House has basically retained its original facade.

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:

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a nineteenth century retail building that has been a landmark at the important Queen and Albert Street intersection for more than a century; and as it provides nineteenth century facades to two CBD street frontages.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance as a fine example of a Victorian Academic Classical style building, with its opulent, ornate facades and elegant symmetry and located on a prominent corner.

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

as a building designed by successful Brisbane architect James Cowlshaw.

Supporting images



Beak House during the occupancy of the Black Cat Casket Agency, circa 1944 (JOL)

References

1. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 July 1926
2. *The Sunday Mail Colour Magazine*, 25 October 1992, p.10.
3. Brisbane City Council, Building Register for the month ending October 1926.
4. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, post-1946 building approval cards
5. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
6. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map 1913

7. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 July 1926
8. *Brisbane Courier*, 8 August 1926.
9. *Brisbane Courier*, 21 August 1926.
10. Cosgrove, Patricia & Cosgrove, Siohban, *The Brisbane Year Book*, Sydney, Collins, 1989
11. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificate of Title records
12. Geenwood, Gordon, *Brisbane 1859-1959: A History of Local Government*, Parramatta, The Cumberland Press, 1959
13. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
14. John Oxley Library, newspaper clippings files
15. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 3, 1951.
16. National Trust of Queensland, *National Trust of Queensland Journal*, August 1987
17. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
18. Simmonds, Paul, interview conducted by Jack Ford, 4 July 2005
19. *The Sunday Mail Colour Magazine*, 25 October 1992

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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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