

Heritage Citation



Defiance Flour Mill (former)

Key details

Also known as	Constance House
Addresses	At 109 Constance Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Factory
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Free Style
Lot plan	L25_RP9680; L26_RP9680; L27_RP9680; L9_RP9684
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2010
Construction	Walls: Masonry
People/associations	Messrs Marks and Sons (Architect); Messrs Smith and Trapp (Builder)

Criterion for listing

(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association; (H) Historical association

Erected in 1904 for Crisp, O'Brien and Company, Constance House is four storeys high and built entirely of brick with white facings. The building was designed by Marks and Sons of Toowoomba and was originally used as a flour mill for "Defiance" with an engine room alongside and grain and flour stores located at the rear. The mill was used as a barracks for US soldiers stationed in Brisbane during World War II. The O'Brien family retained ownership of the building until 1946, when Robert Windsor and Son took control of the land until 1982.

History (previous revision)

Crisp, O'Brien and Company was founded in 1898 in Toowoomba by Patrick and Ellen O'Brien and George Crisp. Crisp was a miller and former manager of the eminent Dominion Flour Company in Toowoomba; the O'Briens operated a produce and grocery store. Their first mill was built in Toowoomba in the same year. Success led to the company's expansion into Brisbane and the renaming of the business as the Defiance Milling Company.

Wheat milling had been undertaken by the first European settlement in Moreton Bay, but did not become a commercial venture in Queensland until the 1890s. At that stage, Dominion was the dominant mill in Toowoomba and controlled most of the flour market in Queensland. Reputedly, Crisp, O'Brien and Company was set up in 'defiance' to Dominion: the O'Briens were responding to complaints they had received from wheat farmers, while Crisp was unhappy in his position at Dominion. Another possible origin of the business name is that it was named after a type of wheat.

The new milling venture was so profitable that the company expanded almost immediately. A second Toowoomba site was bought in 1901, now a State Heritage listed site [601306]. Expansion into Brisbane began with the purchase of the Constance-street property in October 1903. Tenders for the construction of the mill were called through November by Messrs. Marks and Sons. James and son Henry Marks had formed a Toowoomba-based architectural firm in the 1880s and designed several major buildings in Toowoomba in the Darling Downs region in the 1880s, including the State Heritage listed St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral (1889), Pigott's Building (1910), the Royal Bank of Queensland, Imperial Hotel and St Stephen's Presbyterian Church. Marks and Sons had also designed the Toowoomba mill for Defiance.

Smith and Trapp successfully tendered to build the four-storey brick mill, although two storerooms at the back, were built by T. Rees and tenders for the brick chimney shaft were advertised in May 1904. The mill was completed by mid 1904 and began processing wheat in October.

The Constance Street mill was well situated for success in the wheat trade. The railway line had been extended to the Valley in 1890, making the area much more accessible and attractive to industry. A rival company's flour mill had been built in nearby Ballow Street in 1902 and, while most of the block on Constance Street between Wickham Street and Alfred Street at the time was residential, Defiance's new mill replaced an asphalt company and an artesian tubing company. Industry and trade had grown so much that by 1904 there were overcrowding problems in the extensive Brunswick Street rail yards. However, there were no such problems for Defiance. With the rail line backing the site and its own railway siding, the mill had easy export access to the sea (via the Eagle Farm line), inland areas (via the main line stretching from the Valley across Queensland) and local access to domestic supply stores from the Valley to Booroodabin, Albion, Lutwyche and surrounding areas. Constance

Street itself was improved considerably in 1904, with electric lights installed from 1904, and the bus route extended along the street in the same year. The company's auspicious position was assured with a contract for the supply of flour for the East in 1905.

The mill announced its arrival in the Valley three months after its completion with an open-day and tours conducted by the miller W.D. Nicholls, in December 1904. The public display drew over 350 people in a single day, despite the warning that no children could be admitted due to the working machinery. Visitors could see the offices to the right of the main building, four storeys of the latest style of machinery, including the first set of diagonal rollers installed in the Commonwealth, elevators, an engine room, and the two storerooms, each with 500-600 ton capacity. The mill produced a ton of flour per hour, which was stored in the flour store or shipped out the railway siding. Externally, the brick building featured impressive ornamentation, with red, white and blue arches over some of the windows, and the 'Defiance' lion on the top of the building. Further addition of a wood and iron grain store was approved in August 1905.

During its early years of operation in Brisbane, Defiance frequently emphasised its use of Queensland-grown flour, appealing to the patriotism of its customers. Defiance had been established in part as a response to the complaints of Queensland wheat farmers who could not always find a purchaser for their produce, and Defiance provided a guaranteed market for them. The quality of local wheat fluctuated and it was often cheaper for millers to purchase wheat from farmers in the southern states. Shortly after Defiance was established in the Valley, Queensland wheat improved and Defiance loyalty was not immediately tested.

Defiance achieved recognition for its flour, winning first prize in the Coronation Exhibition three years running, and receiving a gold medal for its flour in the Franco-British Exhibition in 1911. The company also boasted its position as one of the most up-to-date ten-sack milling plants in Australia.

However, the progress of the Defiance Milling Company was not marked entirely by success. The company suffered various setbacks in the early twentieth century. The death of Patrick O'Brien in 1906 left his wife Ellen with ten children and two mills in debt. She continued the company, borrowing money to pay for the new season's wheat. In 1913, the new Toowoomba mill burnt down and had to be rebuilt. During the rebuilding period the Constance Street mill functioned full-time to fill the orders from Toowoomba. The 1915 Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire Into and Report Upon the Supply and Distribution of Wheat and Flour in the State of Queensland brought to light the closure of Defiance's Brisbane mill in August 1914 'owing to Southern competition; it was not due to the war'. The O'Briens' son,

Thomas (T.P.), took over as manager in 1918, and the Constance Street mill was leased to the Brisbane Milling Company, which had amalgamated with Dominion in 1906. In 1919, George Crisp relocated to Tasmania, leaving the Toowoomba mill without a manager. The creation of the Wheat Board in 1920 caused further problems for millers, when the Price Commissioner fixed flour prices at a rate which caused the closure of two mills in Warwick and the temporary closure of Defiance's Toowoomba mill. While Defiance largely escaped criticism for its exclusive use of high-quality Queensland wheat, the associated costs created problems. Although the Constance Street mill was being used again in the early 1920s, with workers sustaining various accidents on site, Defiance appears to have decided to focus on the Toowoomba mill instead. A newly upgraded Toowoomba plant was announced in January 1922, at the cost of thousands of pounds, while the Constance Street mill was sold to the Brisbane Milling Company in 1922. The sale resulted in accusations from the Wheat Pool that O'Brien had built 'one small mill in Brisbane and abandoned it', but Defiance instead opened a mill in Dalby in 1924, which proved more successful. T.P. replaced his mother as chairman after her death in 1924. Defiance continued as a company until it was taken over in the 1980s, having re-entered Brisbane as the owner of the Albion flour mill.

Problems continued for millers in the 1930s. The Brisbane Milling company ran into trouble with the prices fixed by the Wheat Board, competition from southern manufacturers supplying cheaper flour and a Royal Commission

inquiring into Certain Matters Relating to the Wheat and Flour Industries of Queensland in 1934. The Commission drew attention to the situation that had arisen: Queensland farmers exported their wheat, profiting less than they would by selling to Queensland millers, while millers from southern states who purchased the cheaper wheat from Queensland farmers, exported the flour to Queensland, undercutting the prices of Queensland millers.

In October 1943, the Defiance's Mill was put into use for the 5th US Air Force Service Command. Known as 'the Old Mill', it housed the US servicemen, two of whom left writing on panels within the building. These were discovered by the tenant in 2001.

After the war, the site was owned by Robert Windsor and Son, who ran an engineering manufacturing process from the mill. Space in the building was leased to clothing manufacturers, sheet metal workers, upholsterers. Robert Windsor and Son owned the land until 1982. Part of the plant has since been replaced by the railway line and the main building is now occupied by Beckett Agencies. The smaller building alongside which may have been used as the engine room is now used as a wine cellar for 'Fine Wine Cellars'.

Description (previous revision)

The main building is four storeyed polychrome brick construction, with dark brick walls, cream brick arches and pilasters, and coloured brick string courses. The upper level pilasters, parapet and pediment cappings are rendered. Windows have segmental arches to the lower floors and semi-circular arches to the upper level, and are grouped vertically between pilasters.

The smaller building repeats the colour, fenestration and parapet of the upper level of the main building.

The only alterations are canvas awnings to the entries, and some unsympathetic signage.

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

For its association with the development of Fortitude Valley as an industrial area in the early twentieth century.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

As a rare surviving example of an early flour mill.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

As a rare Brisbane example of the designs of James and Henry Marks, prominent Queensland architects.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

As a rare, intact and particularly fine example of the use of polychromatic face brickwork.

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 association with 'Defiance' flour, an important Queensland milling company and its founders, the O'Brien family.

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 association with architects James and Henry Marks, who designed a number of significant buildings in Queensland in the early twentieth century.

References

1. Brisbane Municipal Council, Register of New Buildings, 1905
2. Queensland Land Titles Office Records
3. Department of Environment and Resource Management, Queensland Heritage Register, Defiance Flour Mill, Toowoomba [601306]
4. Queensland Post Office Directories 1906, 1908, 1923-44, 1924-25, 1926-27, 1944, 1946
5. O'Brien, Thomas Patrick, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol 15, Melbourne University Press, 2000, pg 512-513
6. Marks, James, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Supplementary Vol, Melbourne University Press, 2005, pg 259-260
7. Watson, D and J McKay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th century: A Biographical Dictionary*, Queensland Museum, 1994, pg 123
8. Dunn, Peter, *Australia At War: Old Mill Barracks*, [<http://www.ozatwar.com/locations/oldmillbldg.htm>] accessed 28 July 2010
9. *Brisbane Courier*, 1880, 1902-5, 1915, 1917, 1921-3, 1931
10. *The Queenslander* 1885, 1892, 1911
11. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1921
12. *Courier Mail*, 1934

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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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