

## Heritage Citation



### Drysdales Chambers (former)

#### Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 580 Queen Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
<b>Type of place</b>	Shop/s
<b>Period</b>	Interwar 1919-1939
<b>Style</b>	Free Classical
<b>Lot plan</b>	L101_RP170326
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — June 2006
<b>Construction</b>	Walls: Masonry
<b>People/associations</b>	Reupert T. Erskine (Architect)

Drysdale's Chambers was constructed for Drysdale's Ltd, a pharmacy, in 1927. The building, designed by Reupert T. Erskine, was an extension to an earlier, nineteenth century building that occupied part of the site. Drysdale's continued to occupy the building until the early 1980s.

## History

The portion of Queen Street on which the former Drysdale's Chambers is situated has undergone extensive development over a lengthy period of time. The land was first purchased in 1857. Development of the site, however, did not occur immediately. This is probably because of its location close to Boundary Street – the original town limit, as the name suggests, of Brisbane – which was an area that remained largely undeveloped in this period. The allotment originally fronted Ann Street and has variously been referred to as occupying street frontage on Ann, Wickham and Queen Streets.

The block was developed in the 1880s. This process took place during Brisbane's most significant building and population boom. According to Lawson, "The 1880s were a time of tremendous expansion for Brisbane. In one decade the population of the city almost trebled".<sup>1</sup> In the first half of the decade much of the population growth occurred within the original town limits and in the immediate surrounding areas such as Spring Hill and the Fortitude Valley. During the second half of the decade this expansion, facilitated by new transport infrastructure such as trains and trams, spread increasingly outward into newly created suburbs. The growth in population stimulated the building industry and much of the vacant land that remained within the old town limits was developed.

This is reflected in the subdivision of this allotment in the early 1880s and subsequent construction of buildings, all of which were used for commercial purposes. The first building was a small, one-storey wooden structure, which housed W. J. Westlake, a furniture dealer. Within the next two years several more premises were constructed, including the building that Drysdale's occupied in 1912 and later extended. This particular building was constructed for L. Carmichael, chemist. Carmichael's premise was a brick structure with a second-storey verandah and corrugated iron awning. The second storey was probably an above-the-shop residence, a common feature in this period. Other businesses located in the new buildings along this street frontage included a hairdresser and tobacconist. During this period a service lane was constructed behind the subdivided lots, known as Perry Lane. By 1895 F. J. Timbury, also a chemist, had taken over Carmichael's premises. Timbury continued to operate from this location until Drysdale's assumed tenancy in 1912.

Drysdale's was closely associated with significant developments in the pharmacy industry in Brisbane. During the late nineteenth century, pharmacists worked long hours, often working as late as 10pm.<sup>2</sup> The Pharmaceutical Society Council pushed for earlier closing times following the passage of the Shop and Factory Act in 1901. The Society was successful, limiting the opening time to around 6pm. However, it became apparent that people were finding it difficult to have prescriptions filled after hours. According to a history of the Pharmaceutical Society:

*The matter was discussed at length by the Society's Council, and a proposal finally made that all chemists in the Brisbane area should combine to establish a dispensary which would operate at night and such other times when pharmacies were closed. Further action by Council was deferred until a general meeting of Brisbane chemists considered the suggestion. Subsequently, at the next Annual General Meeting of the Society, members*

decided to form a limited liability company, and in 1912, Drysdale's Limited was established at Petrie Bight to operate after hours.<sup>3</sup>

Drysdale was an individual, so it is likely that he contributed the principal capital to the formation of the company. The decision to open such a pharmacy, and the manner in which the decision was arrived at, is rather unique and it indicates the extent to which the establishment of Drysdale's Chemist represents a key event in the history of the pharmaceutical industry in Brisbane. Indeed, it is possible to say that Drysdale's was the first specifically designated 'day and night' pharmacy in Brisbane.

Following the creation of the company, Drysdale's began leasing the nineteenth century building in the same year. By 1922 Drysdale's shared the premises with Queensland Druggists Ltd. In May 1923 Drysdale's purchased the property. In July of that same year, however, the property was resumed by the Brisbane Municipal Council for the purpose of road widening, as were all the other properties on this section of Wickham Street. This road widening was part of the changes to the CBD brought on by increasing car usage in Brisbane. The various businesses, including Drysdale's, continued to operate until 1926, at which time the actual process of street widening in this section was undertaken. The widening and, in this case, reconfiguration, of the roads, was to have a significant impact on Drysdale's premises.

The undertaking of road widening in the CBD was part of a broader international town planning movement that was prominent between 1912 and 1920.<sup>4</sup> This movement had a significant impact on the Brisbane Municipal Council, leading to the implementation of The City of Brisbane Improvement Act of 1916. Extensive plans were then detailed for the widening of the CBD's "... principal streets, the resumption of extensive areas of land, and the extension of the city's parks and recreational facilities".<sup>5</sup> The Municipal Council borrowed £1,000,000 and work on the scheme began in 1923. The junction of Ann, Queen and Wickham Streets was completely remodelled in the next few years, including the creation of Centenary Park in 1924.

An even more impressive entrance to the CBD from the Fortitude Valley was thus created following the widening of the roads and creation of park space.

The Council's plans for the block included the demolition of most of the properties to make way for the widening of the road and the reconfiguration of Ann and Wickham Streets. Drysdale's was fortunate in that only part of the front of the building would be affected, as the building was close to the existing corner. Drysdale's entered into negotiations with the Brisbane City Council and according to the Council Minutes for 1927:

*Further negotiations have been in progress with Messrs. Drysdale's Limited regarding the resumption of portion of their property fronting Wickham Street between Ann and Boundary Streets. This firm is agreeable in exchange for the balance of the land known as Hemming's and occupied by the Tramway Department, to set back and reinstate at their own expense their existing building, and to make no claim on the Council for compensation in connection with the resumption of the portion of land required for road purposes, which they at present occupy, and further to pay the sum of £1,250. Your Committee recommends that a settlement be arrived at on that basis.*<sup>6</sup>

This was a positive outcome for the Council, as the issue of compensation for resumption of property for Council purposes was generally difficult.

In 1927 Drysdale's resumed ownership of the property purchased in 1923 and the adjacent property as agreed to in the Council minutes, and commissioned Reupert T. Erskine to design an extension to the original building. Erskine operated from 1927-30 from a premises situated in Fortitude Valley. The remodelling and extension was undertaken in 1927. The new building, because of the road widening, angled to the northwest. Consequently, the original facade and part of the nineteenth century building was removed. Construction of the extension was

undertaken by Drysdales Constructions. No reference to this company can be found in the Queensland Post Office Directory (POD), but it is referred to explicitly in both the 'New Building Register' and *The Architecture and Building Journal Queensland*.<sup>7</sup> It is unknown whether the firm is any relation to Drysdales, the chemist. The total cost of construction came to £6,000.

Immediately following the extension of the nineteenth century building, Drysdales was the sole occupant of the Wickham Street frontage. The following year Queensland Druggists Ltd, Manufacturing Chemists returned to share the occupancy with Drysdales. The building was referred to as 'Drysdales Chambers' for the first time in the 1929 POD.

Drysdales offered a "Day & Night Advertising Service" in 1930-31. Drysdales Chambers was constructed in such a way that, whilst only two storeys, the building nonetheless had an extended parapet upon which a large billboard or similar signage could be placed. Often this signage was raised above the parapet and studs for such signage remain on the roof. The location of the building at the junction of Ann and Wickham Street ensured the advertising would reach a wide audience of commuters travelling into the city each day. The parapet continues to be used for this purpose; thus the advertising feature of the building has remained an integral feature of its fabric since the early 1930s. This aspect reinforces the observation that the building occupied, and continues to occupy, a particularly prominent position at the entrance to the CBD.

By 1932 the number of businesses occupying the building had increased. In 1935 a medical practice is also listed, no doubt taking advantage of the proximity of Drysdales pharmacy. From 1950 to 1972 Drysdales Chambers accommodated both the Pharmaceutical Society and the Pharmacy Guild, sharing "staff, rent, and wages".<sup>8</sup> Drysdales continued to operate the chemist until the company sold the building in the early 1980s. Since this time, the building has accommodated a diverse range of businesses. The association of the building with Drysdales, however, is apparent in a Land Court case from 1998 that refers to the building as "the Drysdale (chemist shop) site", showing that years after the business had ceased to trade from there its name was still associated with the site.<sup>9</sup>

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## Description

This is a small two-storey building in a very prominent corner location. Although the building was designed with an extended parapet upon which signage could be prominently placed, the current billboard not only is completely at odds with the building but also completely obliterates the architectural elements of the parapet, which are essential for the full appreciation of the building.

Drysdales Chambers, notwithstanding its odd shape, presents elements of the Inter-War Free Classical style with a symmetrical facade with roman arches on the second floor and a decorative cornice above. The parapet features another cornice, which is currently obscured by the large billboard. An awning is suspended over the street-level glass shop front.

# 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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### Aesthetic

#### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its design, which incorporates elements of the Interwar Free Classical style of architecture, and prominent location.

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### 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 owned and occupied for more than 50 years by Drysdale's Ltd, Brisbane's first designated day and night pharmacy.

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## References

1. Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1973), p. 53
2. Pharmaceutical Society of Queensland, *A Centennial History of the Pharmaceutical Society of Queensland*, 1980, p. 4.
3. *Ibid*
4. Greenwood, Gordon, *Brisbane 1859-1959 – A History of Local Government*, (Parramatta: The Cumberland Press, 1959), p.140
5. *Ibid*, p. 410-11
6. Brisbane City Council, *Reports and Proceedings of the Municipal Council of the City of Brisbane 1927*,

Brisbane, H. Pole & Co, Ltd, 1928, p. 60

7. Brisbane City Council Building Register February 1927-October 1927, 92/11980 and *The Architecture & Building Journal of Queensland*, April 11, 1927, p. 74
8. Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, *A Centennial History*, p. 8
9. Marvella Pty Ltd vs Chief Executive, Department of Natural Resources , at <http://landcourt.qld.gov.au/decisions/PDF/AV98-34etc.pdf>, p. 4, accessed April 2006
10. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website, post-1946 building cards
11. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
12. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map 1913
13. Brisbane City Council Building Register February 1927-October 1927
14. Brisbane City Council, *Reports and Proceedings of the Municipal Council of the City of Brisbane 1927*, Brisbane, H. Pole & Co, Ltd, 1928
15. Coutts, J.V.D. (ed.), *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland, 1927*
16. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
17. Greenwood, Gordon, *Brisbane 1859-1959 – A History of Local Government*, Parramatta, The Cumberland Press, 1959
18. Lawson, Ronald *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*. St Lucia U of Q Press, 1973
19. Mahlstedt & Son City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 16, 1951
20. Geoff Miller, "The Australian Scene" in *Pharmacy: A look back at the past and a vision for the future – a scandalously short introduction to the history of pharmacy*, <http://www.psa.org.au/ecms.cfm?id=98>, March 2006
21. *Queensland Post Office Directories, 1868-1949*
22. Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Queensland), *Buildings of Queensland*, Brisbane, Jacaranda Press, 1959
23. Watson, Donald and Judith McKay. *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940*. (St. Lucia: U of Q Press, 1984)

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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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