

Heritage Citation



Florence House

Key details

Addresses	At 256 Petrie Terrace, Petrie Terrace, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Terrace house
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Filigree
Lot plan	L2_RP190798
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004 Date of Citation — September 2010
Construction	Walls: Masonry
People/associations	Henry Holmes (Builder)

'Florence House' was built 1874 by and for Henry Holmes (builder of Brisbane Girls Grammar plus the Boys Grammar's boarding houses). This terrace house was built as a rental property for gentlemen working in Brisbane's nearby commercial centre. Terrace Houses were an uncommon building style in Brisbane and very few remain. This is the only remaining example of a nineteenth century terrace house constructed as a single (rather than as part of a row) residence in Brisbane.

History

The property at 256 Petrie Terrace started as a larger block of land that was first sold for freehold title in a land sale conducted on 16 September 1861. The Catholic Bishop of Queensland, the Right Reverend James Quinn, of Brisbane, bought the block that was designated City of Brisbane Allotment No.308 for £403.2.6. The Bishop had obtained a substantial block in Petrie Terrace comprising 1 acre, 2 roods and 18 perches.

The Bishop had only recently arrived in Brisbane (on 12 March 1861). Quinn (later known as O'Quinn), while a religious leader, was also a shrewd businessman. The profits that he made from land sales were used to fund the expansion of the Catholic education system throughout the colony. But both Quinn's autocratic style and his property dealings were unpopular and in 1877 a group of dissident Queensland priests complained to Rome about Quinn's frequent land acquisitions. Thus Quinn had added to his Petrie Terrace holdings by purchasing Lots 306, 307, 309 and 310 and adding them to Lot 308 on 21 November 1861. This gave the Catholic Church ownership of a large area of Petrie Terrace and Red Hill covering 7 acres and 9 perches. This locality became known as Bishop's Hill.

Like many property investors, Quinn subdivided his five large suburban blocks into smaller house allotments. Commencing on 22 June 1865, Quinn steadily sold-off his house blocks. On 31 October 1865, the block that is now recognised as 265 Petrie Terrace was sold to Wellesley A. Nicholson Condell of Brisbane. Condell had purchased a small, vacant block measuring 11.25 perches that was designated subdivision 2 of Section 4 of Lot 308. Condell already at home elsewhere in Brisbane so it is thought that he bought the land for investment purposes only. On the day of purchase, Condell mortgaged the property to obtain a bank loan of £90 from William Newton. By 1865, Petrie Terrace had become a named public road. Condell's mortgage must have remained unpaid for Newton seized the property in 1868 and exercised his right of sale. Newton sold the vacant land onto Nancy Susannah Macnish, the wife of William Macnish of Brisbane, on 21 August 1868.

Macnish held onto the block for four years before selling it to Louisa Marianne Elizabeth Holmes, the wife of Brisbane building contractor Henry Holmes. Mrs. Holmes purchased subdivision 2 of Section 4 of Lot 308 on 13 February 1872. The reasons remain uncertain (perhaps a pending divorce?) but Louisa Holmes quickly gave control of the property to her appointed trustees Thomas P. Dudgeon and Francis Holmes on 8 April 1872.

On 22 January 1874, Henry Holmes finally gained ownership of the land on which he was to build his new investment house. Holmes ran an expanding building business and had his own home in nearby Cricket Street. By the mid-1870s, the suburb of Petrie Terrace was almost fully developed. Fashionable residences (e.g. 'Princess Row' built 1863) were being constructed along the ridgeline of Petrie Terrace, where it allowed scenic

views of Brisbane's growing commercial centre, the Brisbane River and the surrounding suburbs. In 1873, ten Petrie Terrace residents had petitioned the Brisbane Municipal Council to turn the sloping block of land situated between Petrie Terrace and Countess Street into a public reserve so as to protect their views and access to healthy eastern breezes. Hardgreave Park was gazetted in 1875, just in time to add to the attractive setting of Holmes' new rental property.

Holmes mortgaged his new purchase on 14 February 1874. He obtained a loan for £400 from James Gibbon. This may have assisted in the funding the construction of a residence on Lot 2. The new house must have been completed or near to completion by October 1874. *The Brisbane Courier* advertised "the largest and best-furnished gentleman's residence about the city" 'Florence House' to let on 10 October 1874.

Holmes was most likely the builder. His son Francis Frazer Holmes would subsequently serve articles of apprenticeship with Brisbane architect Richard Gailey from c1876 to 1881. So it is assumed that Gailey may have designed 'Florence House'. With the rental market in mind, Holmes built a stand-alone, fashionable two-storey masonry residence in the style of a terrace house that was then popular in Sydney. A two-storey house maximised the living space afforded by such Holmes' small block of land. The extra storey utilised the views available from the Petrie Terrace roadway. That the house was double-storey and built of brick and stone made it stand out as an attractive residence when compared to the small, single-storey, timber workers cottages that had or were being built in the surrounding streets. Its first floor featured a large, double living room decorated with a plastered archway, plus two other spacious rooms and a front verandah. The second floor contained four rooms with a top floor balcony. Two fireplaces were built into the sidewalls on both the upper and the lower floors. There was a two-storied, single-roomed extension built in the rear courtyard and it also featured verandahs. With an up-market clientele in mind, 'Florence House' was first rented to solicitor A. Godfrey.

On 4 December 1874, Holmes bought the adjoining vacant (10.75 perches) block of subdivision 3 of Section 4 of Lot 308. In 1879, Holmes mortgaged Lot 2 for a second time. In 1878, because of Holmes' debts, the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney placed a caveat on the vacant land on Lot 3, preventing its sale. This caveat must have been lifted, as Holmes was able to obtain a £2,500 mortgage from the Anglican Church Synod of the Diocese of Brisbane on the vacant allotment on 4 June 1879. But Holmes was contemplating selling 'Florence House' for he advertised its proposed auction in the *Brisbane Courier* on 12 August 1879. The auction was scheduled for 18 August but must have been cancelled. Holmes followed this by mortgaging 'Florence House' on 8 September 1879. He borrowed £300 from the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney. He went further into debt on 9 January 1880, when he borrowed a further £1,500 against Lot 3 from the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney.

The 1880s saw a slow improvement in Holmes' fortune. Holmes was forced to auction all of the furnishings, even the kitchen washtub and boiler from 'Florence House' on 20 December 1881. In 1883, he was awarded the £6,000 contract to construct the first buildings for the Girls Grammar School at Gregory Terrace, Spring Hill. In 1886, he won the £7,000 tender to build boarding houses for the Brisbane Boys Grammar School off Wickham Terrace at Spring Hill. In 1883, 'Florence House' had received its second tenant, John Deazeley, who ran a prominent Queen Street photographic studio. Henry Holmes sold his fashionable Petrie Terrace rental accommodation to Behr Raphael Lewin on 14 August 1885. Retaining 'Florence House' as an investment property, Lewin sold it onto Adolphus Marcus Hertzberg on 15 October 1886. Hertzberg purchased the adjoining vacant Lot 3 on the same day.

Hertzberg was the ex-mayor (1879 & 1884) of Roma in southwest Queensland. After relocating to Brisbane, he and his wife Miriam moved into 'Florence House' in 1887. Adolphus together with his brother Abraham established a successful wholesale merchants firm of A.M. Hertzberg & Co, in Charlotte Street in Brisbane's

commercial centre. The Hertzberg family became prominent members of both Brisbane's Jewish and business communities. In c1898, Hertzberg and his wife moved to a larger home at Bowen Terrace at New Farm.

By the turn of the century, Petrie Terrace had lost its allure as people moved further a field to live in newer suburbs that were serviced by a growing tram and train network. Petrie Terrace, as an old suburb, became run-down and offered cheap, rental accommodation close to the CBD. By 1898, 'Florence House' was being rented again but it was accommodating multiple leases and not a single tenancy as it was operating as a boarding house with Robert Slattery as the live-in manager.. On 30 September 1908, both 256 Petrie Terrace and the neighbouring block were transferred to the state-based financial institution, the Royal Bank of Queensland.

The Bank held onto both properties until the end of the First World War. It disposed of Lots 2 and 3 to Alfred William Palmer on 6 December 1918. Palmer lived in the neighbouring suburb of Spring Hill at 'Selby House' on Wickham Terrace. On 26 October 1926, the two properties passed to Beatrice Tritton. She was the wife of stationary shop proprietor John Gray Tritton and they lived at 'Eastwood' in Vulture Street, Woolloongabba. Both Palmer and Tritton continued to utilise 256 Petrie Terrace as an investment rental property. Lot 3 remained undeveloped as a 1927 sewerage map of Petrie Terrace shows it as a vacant block of land. By 1926, both Lots 2 and 3 had been amalgamated under a single title deed. Joseph McCarthy bought the 22.25 perch property on 19 August 1943. McCarthy was a public servant living in Gregory Terrace, Spring Hill. It is rumoured that 'Florence House' was used as an exclusive brothel during World War Two.

There was a post-war housing boom in Brisbane. An increasing population during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s led to a demand for new housing and therefore the creation of new 'outer' suburbs. Consequently, Petrie Terrace and Spring Hill were considered undesirable locations, almost inner-city slums full of poorly maintained old housing on tiny allotments. Cheap boarding houses such as 'Florence House' contributed to this poor image. The property and its adjoining vacant allotment underwent a number of changes of ownership – Iris Ethel Goodman in 1946, Walter Ladewig in 1952, Giovanni Fichera in 1954, Juan and Rosa Solas in 1956, Weemala Investments Pty Ltd and Amarinda Investments Pty Ltd in 1977. All of these owners used the property as collateral to secure investment loans as a total of eight separate mortgages were lodged from 1946-77. Briefly from 1946 to 1951, Goodman had converted 'Florence House' from a boarding establishment with multiple tenants into two flats. On 19 April 1951, Iris Goodman gained Brisbane City Council permission to return 'Florence House' to a single residence. But the subsequent owner, Walter Ladwig returned it to an inner-city boarding house in July 1952 and by the early 1980s 256 Petrie Terrace had 17 registered small rooms for rent. Only the Solas family appear to have made plans to build on the vacant Lot 3. Their application in 1963 to build four units on the vacant land for the Spanish Club was not approved by Council.

During Brisbane's property boom of the 1980s, both Petrie Terrace and Spring Hill experienced a revival in fortune as people seeking an inner-city lifestyle restored many nineteenth century houses. In 1981, Arnold & Smith Drafting Pty Ltd purchased the property. In September 1983, builder and restoration specialist David Tyler was awarded an \$80,000 contract to restore 'Florence House' to an attractive townhouse. On 12 October 1983, *The Courier Mail* described 'Florence House' as a 109-years old "decrepit rooming house on a busy street." Tyler noted the rarity of such buildings:

"I don't know of another detached terrace house style building like this in Brisbane...There are so few of these buildings around...I'll come up like the day it was built – it really will."¹

The restoration work took six months to complete. Tyler restored the façade, exposing the original front verandahs. He duplicated the cast iron latticework pattern from the front steps' railing for the verandah's railings. He removed many of the boarding house partitions to create 11 main rooms.

On 2 December 1983, 'Florence House', while still undergoing restoration, plus Lot 3 were transferred to Cranmac No.32 Pty Ltd. The company split Lot 2 from Lot 3 on 19 December 1983. The company subsequently built a replica nineteenth century terrace house on Lot 3 (260 Petrie Terrace). It again changed hands when Olivera Pty Ltd became the new owners on 23 December 1986. In 1990, 'Florence House' was put up for sale either for use as professional offices or as a grand city home. The advertising for the property sale revealed that David Tyler had managed to restore original internal features such as the heavy timber staircase, ceiling roses and archways in the main rooms. On 17 June 1998, Paulette Diane Mullaly and Bradley John Barker took control of the property. In July 2007, 'Florence House' was again placed on the property market and it's desirability as a nineteenth century was highlighted:

"Long admired by passers-by for its exterior Victorian-style architecture, Florence House's interior is all class from top to toe. Replicas of the original terrace residence, believed to have been built about 1875, can be seen along the length of Petrie Terrace."²

This last sentence contains an error, as No. 260 Petrie Terrace is the only replica terrace house along the length of Petrie Terrace. The others are original buildings from the 1860s and 1880s.

In 1988, 'Florence House' was identified as being of local historical interest when it was featured in the University of Queensland historian Rod Fisher's book *Petrie Terrace Brisbane 1858-1988*. On 1 January 2004, the 'Florence House' was recognised as a heritage place by the Brisbane City Council when it was entered onto the City Plan Heritage Register (CPHR).

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 the oldest masonry terrace house in the only Brisbane street containing multiple terrace houses.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as Brisbane's only stand-alone nineteenth century terrace house.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

having occupied the same site since 1874.

References

1. "Turning clock back 109 years is an \$80,000 gamble", *The Courier Mail*, 12 October 1983, p. 10
2. "Elegant from Top to Toe", *The Courier Mail* (Real Estate section), 21-22 July 2007, p.2
3. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website, post-1946 building cards
4. Brisbane City Council, 1946, 2001, 2005 & 2009 aerial photographs
5. Brisbane City Council's Central Library, local history sheets
6. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map, 7 February 1927
7. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
8. Woodcock, Steve & Fisher, Rod, *Petrie Terrace Brisbane 1858-1988*, (Brisbane: Boolarong Press, 1988)
9. Gibbney, H.J., "Quinn James (1819-1881)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography Volume 5*, (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1974)
10. John Oxley Library, Brisbane Suburbs – clippings file for Petrie Terrace
11. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
12. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
13. "To Let" column, *The Brisbane Courier*, 12 August 1874
14. "Auction Sales" column, *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 October 1879
15. "Auction Sales" column, *The Brisbane Courier*, 19 December 1881
16. "Turning clock back 109 years is an \$80,000 gamble", *The Courier Mail*, 12 October 1983

17. "Elegant from Top to Toe", *The Courier Mail* (Real Estate section), 21-22 July 2007
 18. "Property in historic area", *The Sunday Mail*, 26 August 1990
 19. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994
 20. http://www.ancestry.com.au/?o_iid=22129&o_lid=22129
-

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised June 2022)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane