

Heritage Citation



Foresters' Hall (former)

Key details

Also known as	Cook's Picture Palace
Addresses	At 213 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006

Type of place	Cinema, Hall
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Italianate
Lot plan	L4_SP272000
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2010
Construction	Walls: Masonry
People/associations	John Richard Hall (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical association; (H) Historical association

This fine, Victorian Italianate style building was constructed in 1880 to the design of prominent Brisbane architect John Richard Hall. It was built primarily as a meeting hall for the Fortitude Valley branch of the Ancient Order of Foresters, however it also became a popular venue for balls, concerts and other social events. The Foresters were a friendly society, established in Australia in 1859, who provided financial and social benefits to members and their families. In 1910, the building was converted for use as a picture theatre and renamed Cook's Picture Palace. Since 1925, the building has been used for a variety of different purposes.

History

Foresters and other Friendly societies were formed in Australia in the nineteenth century as support societies for their mainly working-class members. The societies provided insurance against sickness, death and misfortune which included sick pay, funeral expenses and financial support for families of deceased members. Despite its name, the Ancient Order of Foresters was a relatively young society, formed in Britain in 1834 as a splinter group from the Royal Foresters. Branches, known as courts, were established in Sydney and Adelaide in the 1840s.

The Fortitude Valley branch, 'Court Fortitude' was inaugurated on 7 March 1859 at the Alliance Hall. When Queensland separated from NSW later in 1859, it became the first Foresters court in Queensland. Founding members of the court include George Warren and Thomas Skyring. By the end of 1859 the court had 90 members, with George Warren Chief Ranger and John Heal as secretary. Honorary members, who contributed funds but did not intend to use them, included politician and later Chief Justice, Charles Lilley.

The first Foresters Hall opened five months after the court's inauguration with about forty members and friends present. The hall was attached to the Foresters' Arms Hotel, whose publican George Warren was the court's Chief Ranger. The old Hall was intended for use for concerts, lectures and was 'available in many ways to meet the demands of a progressive community'. The hall also enabled the Foresters to provide a free reading room, open to the public. However, in 1861 the Foresters Hall was adopted for use as the Fortitude Valley primary school. A new Foresters Hall was constructed by George Warren in January 1862, but from April 1863 Court Fortitude Foresters' meetings were held in Harvey's Castle Hotel.

The benefits of membership of the Foresters society were varied and numerous. Primarily, the Friendly societies were charitable institutions, guaranteeing financial security for members in hard times. The object of the 'Foresters' Benefit Investment Society', noted in the Moreton Bay Courier on the inauguration of Court Fortitude, was, 'to give its members independency from the cold frown of the world's scorn, at a time when the father and husband may not through the vicissitudes of life be able to pursue his calling.' Court Fortitude, in accordance with this objective, held benefit balls for the widows and families of former members in 1882 and 1885. In addition were preventative measures: the provision of medical services. Many courts, including Court Fortitude, contracted with a medical professional who would provide medical attendance to its members and their families. Without the society, these services would be unattainable luxuries to many of those within the working-class in the nineteenth century.

The societies also performed a social function for their members: annual balls and reunions of the Court Fortitude throughout the 1870s and 1880s were frequently reported as great successes, with meals, speeches, musical entertainment and dancing (sometimes until 4am). Chief Justice Lilley affirmed this role in his speech at the opening of the new Foresters Hall, describing Court Fortitude as the working-class equivalent of a members' club.

Court Fortitude's first three decades were marked by prosperity and success: by 1871 400 members had joined, although due to death and transfers only 120 members were active. There were 200 active members in 1880 and in 1888 this had leapt to 280 financial members. The court's stable financial position mirrors its popularity: the court's bank balance rose from £300 or £400 in 1871 to £3,592 in 1888. Of Queensland's 345 Foresters in 1880, 220 were from Court Fortitude. The rise of the Valley Foresters' popularity coincides with the development of the Valley itself a small residential population, growing slowly until the economic boom of the 1880s which created dense working class settlement in the Valley. Membership of Foresters in the 1870s and 1880s was around four percent of the population of Fortitude Valley which in 1881, for example, was 5,148. Effectively, however, a much larger proportion of the population was covered by Foresters membership, as the families of the men of Foresters were also cared for by the court.

Given its increasing membership and stable finances, a new and permanent meeting-place was highly desirable. Tenders were called for a new Foresters Hall in February 1880. The hall's architect, John Richard Hall, was a member of the Oddfellows Society and had designed alterations to the Oddfellows Hall in 1879. After the death of the original contractor, the hall was constructed by John Daniel Heal. Heal, as well as being one of the court's founding members and for many years its secretary, was a prominent Valley publican, Alderman (1870-1894) and former Mayor of Brisbane. He had been a member of several of the Brisbane Municipal Council's committees and was the original owner of the land on which the hall was constructed. Heal remained a trustee of Court Fortitude until his death in 1908.

The new Foresters' Hall was built for in a surprisingly short amount of time for such a substantial building – the call for tenders closed in March 1880 and the hall was opened in October that year. Its size (90ft x 40ft) and position close to public transport were proudly highlighted when the hall was advertised for rentals.

Following the construction of the new Foresters Hall, both the United Brisbane District of the Ancient Order of Foresters and the Fortitude District held their meetings there. The Hall became a popular venue for balls, concerts, fundraisers, lectures and public and political meetings and meetings of other societies, such as the Oddfellows. It was also used as a Fortitude Valley polling station. Extensions in 1887 added a second storey, so the ground floor could be let to other groups while Foresters meetings were held on the second floor. Further improvements in 1888 extended the length of the hall and added extra facilities. It also meant that Court Fortitude owned two-thirds of the wealth in the United Brisbane District.

The court had enjoyed success, but by the 1890s it was not without troubles. Secretary Alexander Bell was prosecuted for embezzling nearly £300 from the court's funds in 1896. As industry moved into the Valley,

assisted by the progress of the railway line, the residential nature of the Valley began to be eroded. Instead, courts established in suburban areas thrived, including 'Court Foresters Hope' in Paddington ([601662]). The Fortitude Valley Foresters Hall was offered for sale in major newspapers in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne in late 1900 by the court's trustees, and again in 1902. The court however maintained possession of the hall and hosted its meetings there until 1923, but from 1910 the hall was primarily used for other purposes. Gradually, improvements to State-provided social security diminished the appeal of the societies. In the 1930s the focus of Foresters shifted away from its original social and mutual aid functions. Foresters', amalgamated with other friendly societies, exists today as a financial institution.

Foresters Hall continued to be a meeting place for Valley residents and visitors when it began its new life as a picture theatre. Foresters Hall was leased to Sidney Cook, who renamed it 'Cook's Picture Palace' and, after some internal alterations, opened it on 4 June 1910. This was the first picture theatre in Fortitude Valley and the inaugural sessions played films including the Sydney memorial service for King Edward VII to crowded houses.

The hall was still rented out for meetings and even religious services. In March 1913 alterations to the building submitted by Mr S. Cook were approved. These alterations were designed by respected Brisbane architect H.G.O Thomas. It is believed that the internal pressed metal sloped ceiling was installed at this time. The alterations probably consisted of two single-storey brick buildings flanking the hall, as shown in a 1911 photograph. Both wings were sold and removed in 1924.

The picture theatre ran until 1922 when Cook subleased it. In 1923 the land was sold to Francis Bruce Charlton for £7,250, subject to a lease. The hall's additional brick wings, comprised of approximately 10,000 bricks, were removed and sold in 1924, as they were projecting onto the land that had been resumed for Barry Parade.

Various lessees have occupied the building since then, plying trades as diverse as hairdressing and running a wine saloon. The building has also been used as a café, a millinery factory, the 'Shamrock Billiard Saloon' in the early 1930s, when the site was used for illegal gambling, cabaret hall and nightclub. Alterations were completed in 1974 and 1979. Title passed to the current owners in 1994 and permission was granted in 2009 for further alteration work, primarily to the interior, in order to refit the building as a live music venue.

Description

The building is three storeyed, of brick construction and of Victorian Italianate design. The symmetrical façade is divided by pilasters into three bays. The ground floor (currently obscured) has pairs of semi-circular arched openings flanking a central opening, with the first floor having pairs of squat semi-circular arched openings either side of a blank centre panel. The upper floor has sets of three semi-circular arched openings flanking a wide segmented arch opening leading on to a projecting bracketed balconette. The openings have been blocked off.

Cornice lines delineate each change in level, with another heavy bracketed cornice below a parapet with cast balusters. A triangular pediment spans over the central bay, and the pilasters carry up through the parapet and support cast urns.

Alterations have included a truncated suspended awning at the ground floor springing line, alterations to windows and painting.

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 it demonstrates the growing importance and popularity of friendly societies among the working class community in the late nineteenth century and changing patterns of popular culture.

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 a nineteenth century friendly society building in Brisbane.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

As a neoclassical public building constructed during the economic boom of the 1880s.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

As a relatively intact example of a Victorian Italianate community building designed by prominent Brisbane architect John Hall.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

As a local landmark in Fortitude Valley, the venue for a range of local community services until 1910 and as an entertainment value from 1910.

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 prominent nineteenth century Brisbane architect John Hall.

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 prominent Valley publican and politician John Daniel Heal, owner of the land on which the Hall was built and a trustee of the Hall from 1888.

References

1. John Oxley Library Photograph Collection
2. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 1861
3. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1863, 1864, 1867, 1875, 1880, 1888, 1902, 1910-1, 1923-4
4. Queensland Land Titles Office Records
5. F. Brown, Manuscript Papers, Box 5, Box 7, John Oxley Library
6. Pugh's Almanac and Queensland Directory, Brisbane, The Proprietors, 1880, p.182
7. T.H. Kewley, *Social Security in Australia 1900-1972* (2nd edition), Sydney University Press, 1973
8. Greenwood, G and Laverty, J, *Brisbane 1859 1959*
9. W.F.Morrison *The Aldine History of Queensland 1888*: Book 1 – Brisbane
10. Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit, Fortitude Valley Heritage and Character Study, 1995

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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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