



# Heritage Citation



# J.P.C. (Jenyns Patent Corset) Building

## Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 327 George Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
<b>Type of place</b>	Shop/s
<b>Period</b>	World War I 1914-1918
<b>Style</b>	Georgian Revival
<b>Lot plan</b>	L6_RP847
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — April 2009
<b>Construction</b>	Walls: Masonry - Render
<b>People/associations</b>	Chambers and Powell (Architect)
<b>Criterion for listing</b>	(B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

The J.P.C. Building was purpose-built in 1916 as the headquarters for Jenyns Patent Corsets. This company, originally one of the few surgical instrument makers in Queensland, began specialising in corset manufacturing just prior to opening their shop on George Street. This was a time when corsets were the mainstay of female undergarments and Jenyns became a prominent brand in Australian corsetry. By the 1980s, with the collapse in demand for corsets, Jenyns underwent a number of changes and branched into other medical products such as prosthetics. With the demise of Jenyns in 2004 after its sale to Coloplast, the J.P.C. Building is Brisbane's only reminder of the now obsolete local corsetry industry.

## History

The JPC Building was purpose-built in 1916 as the headquarters for Jenyns Patent Corsets Pty Ltd. Ebenezer Randolph Jenyns began his cutler (knife maker and repairs) business at 125 Elizabeth Street in 1902, sharing a shop with Known & Co cycle engineers. By 1906, Jenyns had expanded his business to include the manufacture of surgical instruments. This was a very specialised industry with Jenyns being one of only five surgical instrument makers and importers in Queensland at that time.

In 1908, Jenyns shifted his business to another leased premises at 321 George Street. By the turn of the century, George Street from Ann through to Roma Street, had developed into an important retail precinct. This

was primarily due to its proximity to Roma Street Railway Station (built 1873) and the Roma Street Market (built 1884). Jenyns' cutler business would have benefited from moving closer to the Markets where both meat and produce were sold while nearby Roma Street Station was handy for the distribution of his products to intrastate customers.

Soon after the move to George Street, Jenyns ceased advertising as a cutler and concentrated instead on the production of surgical instruments. In 1909, Ebenezer's wife, Sarah Ann Jenyns, joined him as a surgical instrument maker. Sarah was a Royal Brisbane Hospital nurse and she and her husband also experimented on designs for a new corset that could be worn either as a fashion accessory or for medical purposes. By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Jenyns had patented their design and the couple began marketing the Jenyns Patent Reducing & Supporting Corset. They issued booklets that described the features of the corsets and their other health products such as abdominal belts, trusses and surgical supports. These booklets stressed the health benefits of their products and made much of the fact that their corset had been awarded the Certificate of the London School of Hygiene. Corsets had, by this time, become a long-established fashion accessory for women. Yet by 1915, only two Brisbane firms – Mrs Beale's Queen Street shop and the Health Corselets Manufacturing Company in East Brisbane – were making corsets for the ladies of the state, with imports being the other source of supply. Thus the Jenyns had a ready-made market for which to present their patent corset.

In 1916, Sarah Jenyns purchased the land and building at 321 George Street. Plans for the new building had been drafted in the year before Sarah's purchase. She applied to the Brisbane Municipal Council for a new brick building to be built on the site. The Queen Street architectural firm of Chambers & Powell won the tender to design the new Jenyns premises. Claude William Chambers and Lange Leopold Powell commenced their partnership in 1911. By 1915, however, Chambers had moved to Sydney and therefore Lange Powell would have been the major influence over the design of the JPC Building. In 1915, Chambers & Powell were also working on the design of a new Brisbane Associated Friendly Societies (BAFS) building on the neighbouring site at 331 George Street. They advertised the tender for construction of the JPC Building on 3 (or 8) July 1915 with the construction contract awarded to builder Blair Cunningham, who had offices in Elizabeth Street. While accommodating the individual needs of their two clients, Chambers & Powell designed a complementary set of three-storey buildings with arch windows on their first floors and rectangular windows on their top floors.

The completion of the new JPC Building and the neighbouring BAFS Building in 1916 was followed by a renumbering of the businesses along the George Street block located between Turbot and Ann Streets. The JPC Building became 327 George Street. With the opening of BAFS's fourth Brisbane dispensary next door and with Jenyns selling surgical instruments, surgical belts and other health products from 327 George Street, the two buildings formed a small medical and health centre within the George Street retail precinct.

Sarah Jenyns formed the company Jenyns Patent Corset Pty Ltd in 1922 with the JPC Building as the company's headquarters. The company's corsets were made for Jenyns in a factory in Fortitude Valley and then stored and distributed through the JPC Building. Personal fittings were also conducted in the JPC Building. The early success of Jenyns was shown in their regular advertising in the annual editions of the Queensland Post Office Directory (POD). Each advertisement featured a new illustration for each separate edition of the POD, which was unusual for advertisers at that time. Sales of the Jenyns Patent Corset were such that the company became a "great name" in Australian corsetry.<sup>4</sup> Jenyns claimed that their corsets were "highly recommended by the Medical Profession" and that it had "thousands of satisfied and delighted wearers".<sup>5</sup> Among the innovations brought to corsetry by Jenyns was a "unique way of securing the straps by fitting a lace-hole over a small spigot sewn to the side of the corset"; the use of cluster-lacing that had no pulley advantage; and corset straps that were secured by pins.<sup>6</sup>

In March 1925, Sarah Jenyns mortgaged the land and building at 309 George Street, allowing the company to expand its operations beyond the confines of the small JPC Building. Sarah Jenyns shared ownership of the newly acquired property with family members, Ebenezer Randolphus Jenyns the Younger, Sadie Beelinda Jenyns, John Richard Thompson Jenyns, Edith May Jenyns and Herbert Carrington Jenyns. In 1933, architect Richard Gailey jnr was employed to design additions to the building. That same year, Jenyns moved their headquarters to the larger premises at 309 George Street and over time leased the JPC Building to a variety of businesses such as an antique shop, a shoe shop, a florist, a grocer, a milliner and a pawnbroker.

By the 1930s, corsets were starting to lose out to new elastic undergarments in the women's fashion business. The new undergarments, however, were expensive to buy, particularly during the Great Depression (1929-39). Clothes rationing during World War Two also made these items difficult to obtain. By 1939, Jenyns was one of ten corset makers in Brisbane, most of which were single-person operations. By 1949, this number had dwindled so that only Jenyns Patent Corset Pty Ltd and Berlei Ltd manufactured corsets in Queensland. Of the two companies, Jenyns was the oldest and therefore the better-known corsetry brand.

Sarah Jenyns died on 29 February 1952, though her company continued. During the 1950's the Jenyns product line continued to grow to include orthopaedic supports, brassieres, wraps, step-ins and panties. In 1959, such was the company's success that it was one of the advertisers in the Queensland Centenary souvenir book *Queensland Centenary – the First 100 Years 1859-1959*. It took a number of years to settle Sarah's estate before the JPC Building was finally passed to Sarah's business partner and family member Sadie Beelinda (Jenyns) Scott in November 1960. The JPC Building finally passed from the hands of the Jenyns family in July 1961.

Jenyns' corsets remained popular with its ageing customers throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1963, Jenyns was one of the major Queensland companies chosen by the state government to display the new blue, gold and red Buy Queensland Made stickers. This Queensland Government campaign, designed to protect Queensland jobs, ran for more than a decade until the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, however, Jenyns "was sadly in terminal decline" such that the company's seamstresses "used supplies of old stock rather than order afresh."<sup>7</sup> During this decade, Jenyns Patent Corset Pty Ltd was acquired by women's underwear makers Triumph International and then renamed the House of Jenyns Pty Ltd. The House of Jenyns advertising carried the statement "since 1891" which suggests that Ebenezer Jenyns had been conducting his cutler business from another location prior to moving to Elizabeth Street in 1902. The company continued to make the traditional range of Jenyns products but diversified into other medical products. In 1992, the House of Jenyns was sold by Triumph. The company was divided into two separate components with Jenyns Bryant Surgical Corsetry Pty Ltd retaining the production of surgical corsets. The manufacture of other medical products was allotted to Jenyns Pty Ltd, a company

formed by Ken, Pat and Julie Jenyns. By 2004, this company was producing mastectomy products for distribution through a boutique in Milton. Their company has since been taken over by Coloplast but Jenyns remains famous as a brand of corsetry.

As with most commercial premises within the CBD, the JPC Building has undergone many internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different 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. Brisbane City Council approved alterations to its shop front in 1961 and a fire escape was added to the building in the same year.

In 1989, Patricia and Siobhan Cosgrove featured the JPC Building as an interesting historical building in their 1989 publication *The Brisbane Year Book*. As the other Jenyns building at 309 George Street was demolished circa 1973 for the Comalco Building (now the State Law Building), the JPC Building is the only remaining link with the prominent corsetry firm of Jenyns.

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## Description

The JPC building is a narrow, three-storey commercial building, the large arch windows on the first floor and smaller rectangular windows on the top floor spanning almost the full width of the building.

The building, with its symmetric street frontage and double hung round-headed paned windows of vertical proportions, has elements of the Inter-War Georgian Revival style.

The first floor also features a waving balcony accessed by French doors with fanlight. This, together with the tall double hung windows on either side, provides plenty of light and ventilation to this floor. A nameplate on the parapet is the only additional embellishment.

The building has undergone internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different tenants.

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## 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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## Rarity

### CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as a building that was part of Brisbane's now obsolete corset industry.

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## Aesthetic

### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance as a fine example of a small, inner-city commercial building designed in the Interwar Georgian Revival style.

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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 the former headquarters of major Queensland surgical instrument and corset manufacturer, Jenyns Patent Corset Pty Ltd.

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## References

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5. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, post-1946 building approval cards
6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
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15. Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Qld), *Buildings of Queensland*, Brisbane, Jacaranda Press, 1959
16. *The Sunday Mail*, “Help boost state’s jobs”, 29 March 2009
17. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994
18. *Lest We Forget A Guide to the Conservation of War Memorials*, Judith McKay and Richard Allom for the Returned Services League 1984
19. [www.corsetiere.net/Spirella/Jenyns.htm](http://www.corsetiere.net/Spirella/Jenyns.htm), accessed February 2006

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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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