

Heritage Citation



Key details

Addresses	At 440 George Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Shop/s
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L1_SP202344
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — June 2006
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific

Langley's Building was erected circa 1886 and was one of a number of shops built along George Street at this time. These shops created a distinct retail precinct similar to those that developed in Fortitude Valley, South Brisbane and Woolloongabba. Small, modest, nineteenth century masonry shops were once common across Brisbane but ongoing development has seen the demolition of most of these shops, with Langley's Building being one of the few examples to survive. It retains its porphyry and brick cellar, complete with fireplace and earthen floor, features that have been lost from most of the nineteenth century buildings left in the Central Business District (CBD). The building's backyard has also been little developed since its construction.

History

William Langley, a resident of Mary Street, purchased the land containing the present sites of both 440 and 450 George Street in 1871. At this time, the western (upper) section of George Street comprised just a few scattered buildings, including tradesmen's residences, the 'Happy Home' boarding house and two small grocery shops, with the only major building being the Volunteer Arms Hotel on the Ann Street corner. The opening of Brisbane's first railway station in Roma Street in 1873 stimulated upper George Street's development into an important shopping precinct. New shops were gradually erected along George Street to service both the workers at the railway station and goods yard and the passengers who arrived to undertake business in the CBD.

By 1874, Langley had established a boot making business in his single-storey brick shop located at the 440 George Street site and he and his wife Jessie Amelia Langley had moved into a residence around the corner in Herschel (then spelt Herschell) Street by 1876. This area remained sparsely developed according to the recollection of John Capper, which was printed in the Brisbane Courier in 1925:

Roma and George Streets were on the outskirts of the city.... It is hard now to picture a swamp where the Transcontinental Hotel stands and a creek running across the road....There was a bridge over the road in those times, and Mr. Sleath sen. had a shop...and next to Sleath's was Mr. Langley, a boot upper manufacturer.... On the opposite corner of Tank and George Street was a big green paddock where the citizens of the [18]60s used to enjoy themselves.¹

The completion of brick stormwater drains in upper Roma Street in October 1877 and in lower Roma Street a month later, diverted the ground water away from George Street thereby making the area a more attractive proposition for retail development.

Boot making grew to be a profitable business in Queensland, particularly in the 1880s. This was no doubt a result of the trebling of Brisbane's population in this decade. There was a shortage of boot and shoe manufacturers such that by 1888, the 18 small boot factories scattered throughout the colony and the 140 boot makers in Brisbane, could not meet demand and Queensland had to import £179,000 worth of shoes and boots.

By the mid-1880s, Langley was able to fund the redevelopment of his two George Street sites. By 1883, he erected a second, larger bootshop next door at 450 George Street. Then around 1886, Langley organised the construction of a new building on the site of his original shop at 440 George Street. This two-storey masonry building included a work or storage room in the cellar. A brick fireplace was provided on each level of the new building. The upper floor was available as a residence complete with an open verandah set above the street

awning. This modest, unimposing building was typical of the small commercial buildings that were being erected in Brisbane's shopping precincts at the time. Although Queen Street remained the pre-eminent retail precinct containing the most fashionable shops and department stores, other, smaller, thriving retail precincts developed in Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley, Stanley Street in South Brisbane, the corner of Logan and Cleveland Roads, Woolloongabba Fiveways and along the western end of George Street.

The economic boom of the 1880s encouraged the construction of many new buildings in Brisbane. In George Street, the strong economic conditions combined with a number of other factors to strengthen its position as one of Brisbane's major shopping precincts. The building of Brisbane's Supreme Court in 1879 had effectively cut George Street into two components. Subsequent government building programs turned the eastern end of George Street into a government precinct. Pedestrian and road traffic to and from Roma Street Station attracted businesses to the other section of George Street such that "George Street west of Ann Street became a legitimate shopping strip in its own right".² The expansion of Roma Street Station spurred projects such as the erection of the new Grosvenor Hotel at the Ann Street corner during 1881-82 and the Transcontinental Hotel in 1883-84 near the intersection of George and Roma Streets. Between these two hotels, a number of modest two-storey commercial buildings were erected for diverse businesses such as Sleath's music store and tailors Duncalfe & Co. The relocation of the Brisbane Municipal Markets to Roma Street in 1884 brought further trade to the precinct.

A horse drawn tram service to ferry passengers from Roma Street Station to the Queen Street retail precinct was introduced in 1885. With the opening of Central Railway Station in 1889, Roma Street Station lost about half of its passengers but the George Street shops were compensated for this loss of trade by the arrival of the Brisbane Municipal Markets to their end of town. The placement of a Royal Bank of Queensland branch at the Herschel Street corner in 1888 was indicative of the further improvement of this George Street precinct, as was the commencement of a George Street electric tram service in 1897. From 1901, retailers McDonnell & East dominated this precinct. Evidence of the flourishing trade within this precinct was that by 1906, the Transcontinental Hotel was attracting more custom than any other Brisbane hotel.

The erection of his new building at 440 George Street around 1886 was part of a change in business operations for William Langley. He closed his bootshop next door (450 George Street) and offered both buildings for lease. In 1900, Langley sold his Herschel Street residence and land for redevelopment and moved to Eagle Farm Road at Hamilton, where he remained until his death in 1925. His property passed to his wife Jessie and she managed the leasing of Langley's Building until her death in 1942. Queensland Trustees Limited then assumed control of the property until the major Australian shipping company, Burns Philp, purchased Langley's Building in 1946 before disposing of it to the department store chain, Penneys, in 1952.

Langley's Building has housed a variety of tenants, all of whom contributed to the mix of shops that made up the George Street retail precinct. With the exception of 1889 when it was Miss Rosendorff's millinery and drapery and in 1907 when it was vacant, Langley's Building had consistent use as a grocer's shop during the period 1887 to 1918. In particular, from 1890 to 1897, it was known as the City Grocery Store run by a Mr. L. Robinson. The longest tenancy was from 1919 to 1937, when ironically, Robert Gibb leased the building as a boot and shoe shop. His façade signage could still be seen on the building's parapet in 1954. From 1938 to 1942, the building was a fruiterer's shop, operating as the City Fruit Centre. In 1943, during the middle of World War Two, the building was vacant and in 1944 it became the Welcome In Café. In 1956, it was converted to a ladies fashion salon.

As with most commercial premises within the CBD, the former Langley's Building has undergone a number of internal changes over the years to accommodate the

requirements of its different tenants. This is particularly the case with the ground floors of CBD buildings. Brisbane City Council approved alterations to the building in 1946, 1956 and 1958. In 1954, the building's verandah was removed and the doorways converted into windows and a new awning added. The rear of Langley's Building has had extensions added though most of its original backyard has been left undeveloped.

Langley's Building is typical of the small, modest masonry shops erected for Brisbane's small firms during the later decades of the nineteenth century. Very few, however, survive today. In 1986, the National Trust of Queensland published a heritage walk for the George Street retail precinct. In The Old Brisbane Markets Heritage Walk, the National Trust stated:

The combination of Victorian facades in George Street between Turbot and Herschell Streets combine to provide one of the most intact nineteenth century areas in Brisbane.³

In the ensuing twenty years, most of these nineteenth century buildings have since,been demolished. Langley's Building is now one of only four nineteenth century buildings left in this section of George Street. Along with the former Royal Bank of Queensland Building, Langley's Building is a representative example remaining within the streetscape described by the National Trust and is one of the few surviving remnants of the flourishing nineteenth century George Street shopping precinct.

Description

This small two-storey masonry building, with its symmetrical facade, projecting cornice above the first floor and parapet with pediment and urns contains elements of the Victorian Regency style.

Originally it possessed a first floor veranda and an awning supported by posts on the footpath. The building's upper floor veranda was later removed and the awning replaced. The rear of Langley's Building has had extensions added though most of its original backyard has been left undeveloped.

The former Langley's Building has undergone many internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its various tenants.

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 a surviving example of the nineteenth century shops that comprised the upper George Street retail precinct that serviced the Roma Street Station and the Municipal Markets.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as a small, modest two-storey nineteenth century shop with its original earthen cellar and fireplace.

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

with its earthen cellar and small backyard that has remained undeveloped since the 1880s.

References

1. J. M. Capper, "Roma and George Streets in the '60's", *Brisbane Courier*, 18 April, 1925
2. Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, *McDonnell & East, George Street, Brisbane – an appraisal of significance for the Walker Corporation*, Brisbane, Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle Pty Ltd, 1995. p16.
3. National Trust of Queensland, *The Old Brisbane Markets Heritage Walk*, Brisbane, National Trust of Qld, 1986.
4. Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, *McDonald & East, George Street, Brisbane – an appraisal of significance for the Walker Corporation*, Brisbane, Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle Pty Ltd, 1995
5. Brisbane City Council, post-1946 Building Cards
6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
7. Brisbane City Council Archives, photographic collection

8. Brisbane City Council, Heritage Unit citation on 14 Maud Street, Newstead
 9. Brisbane City Council, Sewerage Map 1914
 10. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1925.
 11. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
 12. John Oxley Library, newspaper clippings files
 13. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
 14. Lawson, Ronald 1973, *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia
 15. Mahlstedt & Son, City of Brisbane Detail Fire Survey, Map No. 3, 1951.
 16. Nissen, Judith, *Pedestrian passages and consumer dreamworlds – Shopping arcades of the Brisbane Central Business District*, University of Queensland Postgraduate Diploma of Arts thesis, 1996
 17. *Queensland Post Office Directories*, 1868-1949
 18. Royal Queensland Historical Society, photographic collection
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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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