



Heritage Citation



McWhirter's Motor Garage (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 51 Ballow Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Department store, Garage
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Free Style
Lot plan	L3_RP9641; L1_RP9644
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2013
Construction	Walls: Face brick
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative

This two-storey brick building was purpose-built as a motor garage for McWhirters in the late 1910s when the company was undergoing significant expansion. McWhirters was one of the three largest Valley retailers alongside T.C. Beirne and Overells and flourished as a family department store in the early and mid-twentieth century. The company was renowned for its postal service for country customers and produced regular catalogues for mail orders. It is likely that this garage was used to deliver parcels to the store's Brisbane customers.

History

The firm worked on the principle that “distance shall be no bar to trade”. It had a large number of Queensland country clients and regularly sent parcels to customers in New South Wales, South Australia and even New Guinea. It is likely that the vehicles from this motor garage were used to deliver parcels to Brisbane customers.

The drapery firm of James McWhirter and Son Ltd was founded in 1898. Business commenced in a shop fronting Brunswick Street. The drapery business boomed and McWhirter purchased adjoining land in Warner Street. He then extended his shop to a depth of 260 feet from Brunswick to Warner Streets. The firm later acquired land on the corner of Warner Street and a block of buildings in Wickham Street at a cost of £8,000/-/-. The company's land in Fortitude Valley now extended 105 feet along Brunswick Street with a depth of 126 feet to Warner Street.

A five storey brick building was constructed on the corner of Wickham and Warner Streets in 1912 to the designs of architects, H.W. Atkinson and Charles McLay. A second four storey building, fronting Brunswick Street was completed in 1923. The third part of the vast McWhirters Emporium, the building on the Wickham and Brunswick Street corner, joined the two existing buildings. The distinctive building was designed by prominent architects

Hall and Phillips and built by G.A. Stronach in 1930-31. This five storey addition provided another 250,000 square feet (a little more than two hectares) of floor space at a cost of £130,000/-/-.

McWhirters flourished as a family department store, its many customers attracted by a high quality of goods, variety of merchandise and moderate prices. The store's shop windows, especially at Christmas, became a community focal point. James McWhirters sharp business acumen enabled him to expand his business beyond Fortitude Valley to branches throughout Queensland.

McWhirters was one of the three largest Valley retailers along with TC Beirne's and Overells. All three were family owned businesses. Following the disastrous 1890s floods which drove south side retailers to the north side, the Valley became the shopping hub for greater Brisbane rivalled only by the city centre itself. This trend continued well into the first half of the twentieth century: in 1949 the turnover of Valley residents was estimated at £15 million each year, of which McWhirters, TC Beirne's and Overells accounted for more than £5 million.

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 evidence of the importance of Fortitude Valley as a retail business centre in the early twentieth century; and, as a reminder of a time when family owned department stores dominated the Valley's retail market.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as a unique example of a purpose-built motor garage dedicated to retail delivery

Representative

CRITERION D

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

places

as a unique example of a purpose-built motor garage dedicated to retail delivery.

References

1. Queensland Certificates of Title
 2. Queensland Post Office Directories
 3. E.J.T. Barton (ed), *Jubilee History of Queensland*, Brisbane, H.J. Diddams & Co, 1910, p. 309
 4. *Brisbane Centenary Official Historical Souvenir*, 1924, p. 270
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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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