

Heritage Citation

Rockhampton House

Key details

Also known as	Coorparoo House
Addresses	At 86 Princess Street, Camp Hill, Queensland 4152
Type of place	House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L17_RP55294
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 26 July 2019 Date of Citation — April 2018
People/associations	Oakden, Addison and Kemp (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic

Rockhampton House was constructed in 1887 and designed by prominent Brisbane architectural firm, Oakden, Addison and Kemp. Built on the apex of the hill overlooking the Coorparoo district, the imposing house reflects the area's pattern of development, when the wealthy purchased large lots of land on the rises of the hills away from the crowded inner-city suburbs on which to build grand houses. The house was built for Abraham Street Jnr who embezzled the money from his employer, Barnett & Co.. Abraham was tried and found guilty of stealing over £10,000 and sentence to ten years imprisonment. The Gorrie family owned the property from 1888 and renamed it Coorparoo House. In 1921 John Skirving, successful miner, bought the property and in 1950 his son, Clyde Skirving made alterations to the exterior of the house, including the removal of the Victorian Filigree verandahs.

History

It was not until 1925 that the locality was called Camp Hill. In the early days of settlement, Camp Hill was a waterhole resting place for teamsters and other travellers on the trip between Brisbane and Cleveland. From the mid-1850s, Camp Hill was settled as small farms, dairies and vineyards and included a strong German community. Many farmers had come to Australia as assisted immigrants and had been allocated land grants or paid two shillings and sixpence per acre (0.4 hectares) for selections. Many of these properties were later sold off during the 1880s when much of the Camp Hill land was subdivided by entrepreneurs.

In the late nineteenth century the district was known as Coorparoo or East Coorparoo. Much of the available land on the apex of hills was purchased by wealthy residents on which to build large, stately houses away from the increasingly crowded inner-city areas. In 1885 Abraham Street Jnr purchased just over three acres of land that included the subject property. Street was employed by Barnett & Co., warehouse and import business on Market Street in the city. Initially Street was employed as an office-boy but worked his way to a trusted position managing the company's finances.

In 1887 Street jr. commissioned Brisbane based architectural firm, Oakden, Addison and Kemp, to design a grand house for him on the Camp Hill land. From 1887 to 1895 the firm undertook the design and building of some of Australasia's major building works, with clients including large companies and banking corporations. The firms remaining Brisbane work includes The Mansions on George Street, Albert Street Wesleyan Church, and Cumbooquepa in South Brisbane (Somerville House).

On completion, the grand timber and brick home was named 'Rockhampton House' and was one of two grand houses designed by Oakden, Addison and Kemp for Street. The other was situated close by and was named 'Wandoo'. In 2018, Wandoo is situated on the opposite side of Princess Street.

Street became conspicuous for spending large amounts of money on these grand houses and a lavish lifestyle, whilst his employer, Barnett & Co., was increasingly troubled financially. Following police investigations, Street was arrested on suspicion of embezzlement and fraud. After a well-publicised trial, Street was convicted of defrauding over £10,000 pounds from Barnett & Co. and sentenced to ten years prison in Boggo Road Goal. At the conclusion of the trial, the judge described Street's actions:

Debauchery and gambling, indulgence in sports quite above the convict's station, and in mad speculations of which he knew nothing, made a pretty catalogue for a man not much more than 30 years of age. He goes to a felon's cell, a felon's dress, diet, and degradation without a tongue being moved to commiserate. ¹

It was reported that as Street was being removed from the court following sentencing, he laughed and shouted "I didn't care if had been twenty years"². Street's crime led directly to the failure of Barnett & Co..

Following Street being declared insolvent, Rockhampton House was sold to George Dingwell Gorrie and Isabella Gorrie in 1888. It is unclear how long the Gorries resided at the Camp Hill property as they were not recorded in the Post Office Directories nor the Electoral Rolls for the majority of the time they owned the house. From 1889 to 1890 the Gorries took out a succession of mortgages, each over £1000. In April 1891 the property was advertised for sale:

Magnificent Family Mansion known as Rockhampton House
Situated on a Beautiful Hill

The Mansion is a large two-storeyed brick dwelling of 14 rooms, including drawing room, library, dining-room, cloakroom, five bedrooms, bathroom, cellar, pantry, kitchen, storeroom, servant's room, man's room, washhouse, waterclosets, and urinal, and is faithfully built of the best materials ... the staircases and mantelpieces are in themselves Works of Art and the purchaser will find himself possessed of without doubt the Handsomest Family Mansion in the Colony of Queensland. ³

The property, however, was not sold at this time and remained in the Gorrie's possession until the 1920s. Under the Gorrie's ownership the name of the house was changed to 'Coorparoo House' and for a time was tenanted.

In 1921 John Skirving purchased the property and was first recorded at the Princess Street address in the same year. Skirving had made his fortune as a partner in the ownership of several far north Queensland tin mines. Prior to the Skirving family moving into the Princess Street house, they had resided for several years in Auchenflower. John Skirving died in 1944 and left the property to both his sons, Clyde Douglas Skirving and Glen Sinclair Skirving. In the early 1950s Clyde Skirving, recorded as a commercial traveller and indent agent, bought his brother's share of the property.

In 1950 the exterior of the house underwent several alterations which were featured in a newspaper article in the Brisbane Telegraph, entitled "'New Look' Luxury". Following the introduction of Parisian fashion designer, Christian Dior's 'New Look' in 1947, which purposefully stepped away from the militaristic and austere women's fashion of the war years, Dior designed garments with full skirts, small waistlines and feminine lines using fine materials unobtainable during the war. In relation to the alterations made to the house, the article quotes Skirving lamenting the harsh war years when "the scarcity of materials made it impossible to build". ⁴ In 1950, however, he was able to carry out these changes to the house, in response to changes in fashion.

The changes to the house included the enclosing of the verandahs and the rendering of the external face-brick. Inside the house minor changes were made including the installation of electric appliances in the kitchen, hot water service and a washing machine. The article stated that the majority of the Victorian internal features had been retained:

All of the best qualities of the old home have been retained ... The 16 ft. high ceilings in the downstairs rooms retain their original lath and plaster ... The house has five bedrooms, a toilet and bathroom upstairs. Downstairs are four rooms, including a lounge-dining room, sunroom-nursery and kitchen. In the lounge room the Italian marble fireplace of the old home has been retained. Solid cedar sliding doors divide the lounge from the dining room ... The building stands on an acre of its own well-kept lawns and gardens. The circular drive is lined with small cypress pines. ⁵

The alterations did not diminish the striking and imposing impression the home made on the high hill. In 1962, the Skirving family sold the property to pharmacist, Colin George Caswell.

In 1977 Caswell had the 'Italianate' style entry porte-cochere constructed as well as the small verandah on the front of the ground floor bay window. The swimming pool was constructed earlier in 1967.

Rockhampton/ Coorparoo House remains one of the finest houses in the Camp Hill area and is important to the history of the area as it represents the pattern of development when the wealthy purchased large allotments situated on the apex of hill on which to build their stately homes away from the crowded inner-city suburbs and the continuation of this occupation through the twentieth century with alterations to update the house reflecting the fashions of the time.

Description

Rockhampton House is a large two-storey Victorian period house with stripped and replaced elements of different styles and periods. It is located on a narrow, suburban street of Camp Hill. The subject house features rendered masonry walls, a prominent faceted bay window, large porte-cochere and balcony with cast concrete baroque balusters and a hipped roof.

The subject area of Camp Hill has a strong residential character that has developed at different stages. This is demonstrated in the different styles and periods of buildings on display. Princess Street consists mostly of single storey houses of similar scale and different styles with narrow frontages. Rockhampton House and the related property Wandoo, located across Princess Street, have much wider frontages and larger yards than others nearby.

The subject property is enclosed by a rendered masonry wall and hedges. A concrete semicircular driveway provides vehicular and pedestrian access to the house which is sited at the south-east corner of the property and the highest point in the site. The large yard contains a garage connected to the house via a covered walkway as well as a tennis court and a pool.

The feature porte-cochere extends west from the front façade, covering cascading brick stairs that lead to an arched front doorway. Timber frame double hung windows are found throughout the building. The two-storey faceted bay to the north of the porte-cochere features tall step through windows with a small face brick veranda at the front. At the first floor level is an arcade which is enclosed with French doors. Baroque balusters on top of the porte-cochere continue around the south of the house. Entablature is located below the first floor window sills as a feature on all facades.

There is a veranda at ground level of the northern side elevation which continues around to the rear. On the first floor, three timber casement windows are set within arched openings with solid infill in the top arch segment. The rear of the house opens to the veranda and backyard through a combination of timber framed bi-fold and French doors.

The hipped roof is clad in terracotta tiles. A skirting roof is located between the two levels and encircles the house. The roof features three rendered chimneys with corbeled details and columns of recessed brick on each side.

The interiors appear mostly in their original form with ornate period detailing throughout (Realestate.com.au). There are timber floors throughout with tiled finishes in the kitchen and dining room. Generally ceilings are tall and feature ornate mouldings and cornices. Stained timber joinery includes moulded skirting boards and architraves with timber panelled doors. The interior hall also features a timber staircase, visible from the entrance through two arched openings (Realestate.com.au).

The house has had several additions and alterations. These include the addition of the porte-cochere and small verandah which required the removal of the original timber verandah. The exterior walls have also been rendered which covers much of the detail noted in historical photographs. Major additions have been constructed to the rear of the house and the arcade at the front of the house has been enclosed. The garage, pool, and tennis court are later additions. Rockhampton house is generally in excellent condition.

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 striking, architect-designed house built in the 1880s when the wealthy established large homes on the apexes of the hills in the then Coorparoo district, now Camp Hill.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a substantial 1880s mansion which retains much of its original Victorian interior features, its large open grounds and circular drive.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a highly prominent and attractive, architect designed, 1880s mansion situated on the apex of the hill which retains its large open grounds and circular drive on 3930m².

References

1. *Telegraph*, 6 June 1888, p4
2. *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 9 June 1888, p3
3. *Brisbane Courier*, 15 April 1891, p8
4. *Brisbane Telegraph*, 8 August 1950, p24
5. *Ibid*
6. Post Office Directories.
7. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
8. Queensland Electoral Rolls
9. Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, *The Character of Residential Areas, Brisbane, A Study for the Brisbane City Council*, 1994
10. Brisbane History Group, *Housing, Health, the River and the Arts*, Papers No. 3, 1985
11. Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Maps
12. Brisbane City Council Building Cards
13. John Skirving, *Auchenflower*, <http://www.househistories.org/#!the-clovelly-story/czfc>
14. Realestate.com.au, 86 Princess Street, <https://www.realestate.com.au/sold/property-house-qld-camp+hill-104870493>

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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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