

Heritage Citation



St Clement's Melkite Catholic Church & Presbytery

Key details

Addresses	At 72 Ernest Street, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101
Type of place	Church
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Romanesque
Lot plan	L11_B118250
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — May 2015

Construction	Roof: Terracotta tile; Walls: Face brick
People/associations	Lebanese Melkite Catholic community (Association)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social

Opened in 1936, St Clement's was Queensland's first Lebanese church and has provided a place of worship for generations of Melkite Catholics. The foundation stone for this church was laid in 1929, however due to a scarcity of donations with the onset of the Depression, construction was halted and it was not until 1936 that, through the determination of the Lebanese community, the church was finally opened. Designed in the Interwar Romanesque architectural style, this attractive polychromatic brick church makes a fine contribution to the streetscape and reflects the early multiculturalism of South Brisbane and its development as an area popular among migrant communities.

History

The Melkites are a sect of Catholics originating from the Middle East - chiefly Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. Migrants belonging to the Melkite Catholic sect who arrived in Australia prior to World War II tended to worship at existing Catholic churches, rather than building their own. In other parts of the country (principally Sydney and Melbourne), attendance at Australian churches was responsible for the rapid loss of native customs and language skills, since the Arabic language and liturgy were replaced by Latin or English.

In Brisbane, the Lebanese Melkite Catholic community was anxious to maintain their native language and customs in their own church. The campaign to raise funds for a Melkite Rite church in Brisbane was led by the very reverend Archimandrite (Monsignor) Sophronus Khoury who had been sent to Sydney from Beirut in 1908. In 1928 he received the permission of the Holy See of Beirut to establish a Melkite Rite church in Brisbane and to minister to the city's Lebanese migrants.

Initially Father Khoury held mass for his small Lebanese congregation at St Mary's Catholic Church, South Brisbane. He initiated a fund raising campaign among the Lebanese community and formed a committee which by 1929 had raised enough money to purchase the land on which the church was later built. The land already contained a small timber house.

The house was probably built around 1918 as a rental property by Amy Perry and her husband Stephen Dudley. The Perry family had owned the 36 perch block of land since it was first sold as a Town Lot in September 1859.

The foundation stone for the new church was laid and blessed by Archbishop James Duhig, Bishop Malouf (who was visiting from Lebanon) and Father Khoury on 7 March 1929. However the campaign to raise more funds for the construction of the church itself suffered a major setback with the onset of the 1930s Depression. Despite this, the small but devoted group of Lebanese migrants continued to raise money until finally in 1936 sufficient funds had been collected to allow the church to open for worship. It was furnished by donations from Lebanese families.

Soon after the church had been completed the adjoining weatherboard house was modernised in brick to match the church and used for a presbytery which became the centre of all social gatherings.

The South Brisbane area housed many of Brisbane's migrants earlier this century, as it continues to do today. The availability of cheap housing and its proximity to public transport and employment in local industries attracted new arrivals to the closely settled area. Successive generations of migrants in the district have left a legacy of buildings reflecting their cultural diversity. Today the area boasts places of worship built or converted for use by the Greek, Serbian, Lebanese, Russian and Islamic communities in addition to a number of Irish/Anglo churches.

St Clement's continues to play an important role in the lives of Brisbane's Lebanese community. It remains a place of worship and fellowship and helps to maintain traditional customs and language.

Description

St Clement's Melkite Catholic Church and Presbytery stand on a prominent corner site in South Brisbane facing Ernest Street. Both buildings stand in a small yard with a low boundary fence of facebrick with an iron gate and are surrounded of three sides by much larger, later buildings, which emphasises the petite scale and charm of the buildings.

Church

The church is a modest, one-storey building in a decorative Interwar Romanesque style. It has facebrick walls and a gable roof clad with terracotta tiles. The symmetrical rectangular building is enlivened by a decorative gable end western front that features a variety of high-quality decorative dichromatic brickwork.

Reached by a wide, branching front stair, the front entry into the church is a central arch-headed door in a stepped arch opening, implying greater depth in the front facade than in reality. To each side of the doorway are tall, narrow round-arch headed windows and stepped corner buttresses extend above the parapet with semi-circular tops. The gable apex is crowned with a cross. The Merivale Street side of the church is articulated into bays divided by buttresses and most bays feature round-arch headed leadlight windows. At the east end (rear) of the church is a small concave apsidal projection. The church's openings are emphasised with darker brick.

Presbytery

The presbytery stands beside the church and also faces Ernest Street. It is a one-storey, highset timber residence with a hipped roof and projecting front room gable. The roof is clad with corrugated metal sheets and the exterior walls are clad with a skin of facebrick. The front room projection is also crowned by a cross. The windows are timber framed casements.

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 the first Lebanese Church in Queensland, it reflects the cultural diversity of South Brisbane and the patterns of migration that have impacted the area.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a highly-intact church in an Interwar Romanesque style that makes a fine contribution to the streetscape.

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

the brick church and presbytery have had a spiritual and cultural connection to the Lebanese Melkite Catholic community from the 1930s and played an important role in maintaining Lebanese customs and language in Brisbane.

References

1. Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit, 'Historical Context Report', 1993 *South Brisbane Area Heritage Study, Part A: Project Report*
2. Malouf, Alexies, 1979 *St Clement's Church, South Brisbane Queensland, 1929-1979: the Golden Jubilee*, Brisbane: Leader Press
3. McKay, J. and T. Batrouney, 1988 "Lebanese" in James Jupp (Ed), *The Australian People: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson

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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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



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