

Heritage Citation

St Ita's School and Presbytery

Key details

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| Addresses | At 259 Gladstone Road, Dutton Park, Queensland 4102 |
| Type of place | Church, School, Residence (singular), Private school |
| Period | Interwar 1919-1939 |
| Style | California Bungalow |
| Lot plan | L238_SL9045 |
| Key dates | Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — July 2015 |
| Construction | Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber |
| People/associations | Hall and Prentice (school) (Architect); Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing & Co (presbytery) (Architect) |
| Criterion for listing | (A) Historical; (G) Social |

St Ita's Church was established in 1917 as a Catholic centre for the growing suburb of Dutton Park. The school was added in 1919, with the Ursuline Sisters brought from Armidale to manage the education of local Catholic children. The Presbytery, originally established in an old house named 'Borva', was rebuilt in 1926. A secondary school, St Ursula's, operated 1957-1974, and is now the site of the Brisbane Catholic Education Centre. The only surviving historic buildings are the Presbytery (1926) and the original school building and church, now the parish hall (1919).

History

Land sales in Dutton Park took place from the 1850s, and a small number of grand residences were built along Gladstone Road from the 1860s. Settlement increased after the gazetting of Dutton Park and the opening of the Boggo Junction railway station (now Park Road). Although the area was not densely populated, by the 1880s there was sufficient demand for a school, and the Woolloongabba State School opened on the site of Dutton Park State School in 1884. The school was designed to accommodate 400 pupils, and was quickly overcrowded with 500 enrolled students. The arrival of the tramline in the early twentieth century encouraged more occupation of the area, including industrial development.

The growing population included a number of Catholic residents. In November 1917, Archbishop James Duhig called a meeting of those interested in the creation of a Catholic parish on Gladstone Road, at Dutton Park. Duhig, who arrived in Brisbane in 1912 as coadjutor, was focused on developing the church's physical presence in Brisbane. His enthusiasm for establishing new schools, churches, chapels, convents and hotels earned him the nickname 'James the Builder'. As part of his expansion program, he noted suburbs of growth with a view to providing Catholic services in the newly developing areas, and this included Dutton Park. In 1915 or 1916 Duhig had negotiated to purchase a residence called 'Borva', though title to the property did not pass to him until 1918. Borva was one of Dutton Park's oldest residences, having been built in the 1860s. It sat on an appealing site fronting Gladstone Road with a 'magnificent' view over the river to the agricultural land at St Lucia.¹

Father Philip Corrigan was transferred to Dutton Park and the first Mass was celebrated in December 1917, under the patronage of Saint Ita. The service was held in Borva, which functioned as the presbytery and church. Duhig took the opportunity to announce that he had invited sisters from the Ursuline Order in Armidale to take charge of a school which would be opened at Dutton Park. As well as his focus on construction, Duhig emphasised the provision of Catholic education to Brisbane's Catholic students. There were Catholic schools in the nearby suburbs of Kangaroo Point and South Brisbane, but the first Mass, which saw Borva filled to the verandahs, had demonstrated the presence of the Catholic faithful in Dutton Park, and the desire for a similar school in the area.

Duhig's invitation to the Ursuline Order brought them to Queensland for the first time. The order was established in Brescia, Italy by Angela Merici in 1535. The Ursulines prioritised education, establishing their first school in 1660. The order arrived in Australia in 1882 to set up a school in Armidale, followed by a second school in Tweed Heads in 1917. The opportunity to establish a branch in Brisbane suited both the Archbishop, who welcomed external educational orders, and the Ursuline sisters, as the branch would facilitate travel to Tweed Heads. Superioress Sister McNamara arrived in Brisbane from the Armidale convent in December 1918. She and four other sisters were housed in a residence opposite the church on Gladstone Road. The enclosed order had to seek papal permission to take the daily ten minute walk from the convent to the school, also held in Borva.

The first classes at St Ita's School were held on 27 January 1919. With 78 students enrolled by April, Borva was severely overtaxed and the decision was made to construct a new school building. Lack of funds meant that the new building would also be the church, with Borva retained as a presbytery for Father Corrigan. Architectural firm Hall and Prentice were engaged to design the school, and contractor Edward Duhig undertook the construction. Archbishop Duhig laid the foundation stone on 6 April. The building was projected to be finished by May, but the outbreak of the 'Spanish flu' stopped building work and closed the school. The 'handsome building' was not opened until 3 August. 'It is practically a two-story building,' the Brisbane Courier informed its readers:

the basement being divided into a junior school and a space for recreation, the main hall being

reserved principally for church purposes. The upper storey rests on substantial brick walls and piers, and is itself constructed of first-class timbers...Verandas run around the front and both sides of the building. Ample ventilation is provided (*Brisbane Courier, 4 August 1919 p8*).

St Ita's was one of the first designs for architectural firm Hall and Prentice, established earlier in 1919. The partnership went on to become one of Brisbane's most renowned architectural practices, responsible for the Brisbane City Hall, Tattersalls Club, McDonnell and East Building, and residence 'Maritimo'. For the Roman Catholic Church, Hall and Prentice designed the science hall of St Joseph's Christian Brothers School College, Our Lady of Victories Church at Bowen Hills, the Holy Family Church, school and presbytery, at Indooroopilly and the St Francis of Assisi Church, school and convent.

Funding for the building – estimated to cost £2700 inclusive of site preparation work – was provided by the local community, private benefactors and fundraising fetes. St Ita's was already playing a role in Dutton Park, a suburb still described as 'happily secluded' in 1919.² The Order provided education to non-Catholic students as well as Catholic, with Anglican pupils enrolled at the school, and the Ursuline Sisters earned money providing music lessons to local children. The church itself developed a small but devoted congregation under the ministry of Father Phillip Corrigan, one of Queensland's pioneer priests.

In October 1925 Borva was badly damaged in a storm which swept through Dutton Park. The building was deemed beyond repair, though it was used for supplementary classrooms for the growing school until 1932.

Plans for a new presbytery were designed by architectural firm Hennessy, Hennessy, Keeling and Co, with Jack P Donoghue. The firm was a Sydney based architectural practice which had extensive experience and had already designed a number of outstanding buildings for the Catholic Church including the main building at Stuartholme School, Nazareth House and Corpus Christi Church.

The foundation stone of the presbytery was laid on 2 May 1926 and the building was blessed and opened in October. 'The house, though modest in dimensions,' said Archbishop Duhig at the opening ceremony, 'still fulfils all requirements. It has been well planned and constructed, and is not only comfortable for the priest, but is convenient of access for his people' (The Catholic Press, 14 October 1926 p23). Father Corrigan moved into the parsonage, where he celebrated his golden jubilee of mission in Queensland in 1929. The presbytery housed the parish's subsequent priests and at time of writing (2015) still functions as the presbytery.

The Ursuline Sisters continued to operate St Ita's school through the twentieth century. Enrolments grew in the 1930s as Dutton Park became an increasingly residential suburb. A new classroom building was added to the school in 1933 to replace Borva. Designed by R Coutts and Sons, it was built from the material of Borva, but is no longer extant.

St Ita's began to provide secondary education in the 1930s, and the site adjoining the school on Gladstone Road was developed over the ensuing twenty years to become St Ursula's College. The college was closed in 1974, and the site and its buildings were transferred to the Brisbane Archdiocesan Educational Council and became the Brisbane Catholic Education Centre.

In 1961 the school property, still held by James Duhig, was transferred to its present owner, the Corporation of the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane. A brick extension wing was added to the original school/church building in 1977, and the building is now used as the hall. A new church was constructed and opened in 1972, and the original church building became the parish hall. Other buildings in the school include the library, administrative building and classroom blocks, all constructed in the twenty-first century.

Description

Church/School

St Ita's Church/School is a two-storey timber building situated on the rise of the hill on Waterview Terrace. The building displays many interwar features including porthole rear window, decorative front and rear gables, timber sash windows, decorative elements on the timber verandahs. There are a series of rendered brick columns at the front of the building. The ground floor has been converted into classrooms.

Presbytery

The presbytery is a modestly designed timber house with a tiled roof. The building is situated on the rise of the hill within the school grounds and overlooks Gladstone Road. It retains many of its original interwar features including casement windows, and decorative eaves.

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 school and church building constructed as a response to Dutton Park's growing Catholic community's spiritual needs in the interwar period; it also demonstrates the increase in the establishment of Catholic worship and educational facilities under the direction of Archbishop James Duhig in this period in Brisbane.

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

as the first and still continuously operating Queensland school run by the Ursuline Sisters and for the strong

connection it has with the Dutton Park Catholic community since 1919.

References

1. Archbishop Duhig, Letter to Mother Teresa Dreschler, Superioress of Armidale Ursuline Convent, 18 August 1918, quoted in Ord, Mary Joan, *A Bridge and a resting-place: the Ursulines at Dutton Park, 1919-1980*, Toowoomba: 1981
2. Archbishop Duhig, speaking at the opening of the church/school building, quoted in Ord
3. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 August 1919 p8
4. The Architectural and Building Journal of Queensland, Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1934
5. Australian Ursulines – Our Story – History (website) (<http://www.australianursulines.org.au/our-story/history>)
6. Brisbane City Council, aerial photographs, 1946, 2012
7. Brisbane City Council Archives, Brisbane Images
8. Brisbane City Council City Architecture and Heritage Team, citations
9. Brisbane City Council, Water Supply and Sewerage Detail Plans, 1937
10. Brisbane City Council, Properties on the Web, Building Cards, Building Register
11. Department of Natural Resources, Certificates of Title
12. McKellars Map 1895
13. Ord, Mary Joan, *A Bridge and a resting-place: the Ursulines at Dutton Park, 1919-1980*, Toowoomba, 1981
14. Queensland Places: Dutton Park (website)
15. Queensland Post Office Directories
16. State Library of Queensland, Picture Queensland (website)
17. St Ita's School, 'Our History' (website) (<http://www.stitasduttonpark.qld.edu.au/aboutus/Pages/Our-History.aspx>)

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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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