

## Heritage Citation



### Stewart and Hemmant Clothing Factory (former)

#### Key details

<b>Also known as</b>	Alexander Stewart and Sons clothing factory (former)
<b>Addresses</b>	At 6 Mclachlan Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
<b>Type of place</b>	Warehouse, Factory
<b>Period</b>	Federation 1890-1914
<b>Style</b>	Warehouse
<b>Lot plan</b>	L13_SP198098; L6_SP198091; L7_SP198093; L15_SP198103; L1_SP198100; L11_SP198099; L2_SP198094; L14_SP198098; L10_SP198096; L12_SP198097 ; L40_SP238935; L101_SP233971

<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — July 2010
<b>Construction</b>	Walls: Masonry
<b>People/associations</b>	Alexander Stewart and Sons (Occupant); B. Cunningham - additions (Builder); Claude William Chambers - additions (Architect)
<b>Criterion for listing</b>	(A) Historical; (A) Historical; (D) Representative; (G) Social; (H) Historical association; (H) Historical association

This factory building was constructed in 1898 for clothing manufacturers Stewart and Hemmant. The pair had first established their general drapery business in inner city Brisbane in the 1850s before later expanding into clothing and hat manufacture. The partnership between Stewart and Hemmant dissolved in the early 1870s, however the company continued under Alexander Stewart and retained its name until 1903 when it became Alexander Stewart and Sons. This factory was extended in the early 1900s and additional warehouse facilities were built adjacent to the original factory in 1905, however it constitutes a separate heritage listing. By 1910 the company had retail branches in Sydney, Melbourne and London and was a household name in Brisbane. Alexander Stewart continued to manage the company almost until his death in the late 1910s.

## History

The first part of the building on McLachlan Street was constructed in 1898 as a clothing factory for Stewart and Hemmant. The 1890s was an important decade of industrial expansion in Fortitude Valley. The extension of the train line from the city to Fortitude Valley in 1891 gave impetus to the growth of industry. Proximity to the city and the burgeoning river wharfage facilities also helped to boost the attraction of the Valley to late nineteenth century industrialists. The clothing industry, aided by high tariffs on imported goods, was becoming more prominent. Stewart and Hemmant, one of the oldest drapery establishments in Queensland, embarked on industrial expansion and, in the 1890s, was one of the largest clothing manufacturers. The building on McLachlan Street is a tangible example of the improvement in the conditions of clothing factory workers, showing the impact of government action in the 1890s to improve the conditions of clothing factory workers.

Alexander Stewart and William Hemmant met in Ballarat in 1859 and moved to Queensland, commencing business together shortly afterwards. Their general drapery on the corner of Queen and Albert Streets opened in March 1860. A fire which started in their drapery destroyed most of the buildings on the Queen St block in 1864 and the partners re-established their business on nearby Queen and Adelaide Streets. The business sold draper's wares including fabrics, clothing and accessories and occasionally sundries imported from England. Christmas specials included storage goods, eau de cologne and other toiletries, separation fans. The success of the business led Stewart and Hemmant to open branches in northern Queensland, Sydney, Melbourne and London, and to expand their Queen Street premises in 1874.

In the mid-1870s, Stewart and Hemmant's business changed its focus from retail to wholesale. Hemmant left

the business for politics in 1871, taking a particular interest in shipping and labour legislation, and the tailoring branch was sold to J.S. Manwaring. Later Hemmant left Australia for England, though he retained an interest in the business until the partnership was officially dissolved in 1893. The retail business, which was described in the Brisbane Courier as 'one of the oldest and most extensive retail drapery businesses in this colony', was sold to Reid & Brooks in June 1876, with Stewart and Hemmant instead importing goods as warehousemen. The Queen and Adelaide Street building was refitted to suit the wholesale trade from 1876. The firm was employed to provide the government with blankets in 1880, although problems with the tendering process led to the cancellation of the contract. However, Stewart & Hemmant successfully tendered to provide 9000 blankets to the government in 1886. As with all of Stewart and Hemmant's goods, the blankets were imported from England.

Until this point, Stewart and Hemmant, along with most other clothing and textile merchants in Brisbane, had been dependent on goods being shipped to them from Britain. With Britain's low production costs and minimal duties on imported goods, it was much cheaper to import clothing than to make it, and firms that attempted to compete faced severe difficulties. However, the 1880s brought a change in this situation. Steps were undertaken to encourage the development of the manufacturing industry, including raising duties on the British imports from five percent in 1878 to 25 percent in the 1880s, and the economic boom of the 1880s assisted firms considering branching into manufacturing. By the 1890s, clothing and textile manufacture employed over 40 per cent of Brisbane's industrial workforce (mainly young women), but this new and largely unregulated industry was subject to abuse. Women were often hired instead of men as they could be paid up to a quarter less than their male counterparts for the same tasks: a report in 1897 notes wages for a foreman could be up to £4 10s, while a forewoman would earn 30 shillings. Workrooms and factories were overcrowded and many businesses were suspected of sweated labour. In 1891 a Royal Commission into the conditions in shops, factories and workshops found clothing manufacture was among the worst industries for workers' conditions. 'Sweating' and other abuses continued to be a problem well into the 1890s, although the 1896 Factories and Shops Act directed towards improvement in working conditions did reduce the proportion of clothing made by sweated labour or outwork. It also resulted in the establishment of several large mechanised factories.

Stewart and Hemmant began its clothing manufacturing business in the 1890s in its Queen Street premises.

Reports published on the opening of their new factory in 1898 attributed Stewart and Hemmant's venture to their 'progressive' natures and the 'active personal knowledge and supervision of goods during the progress of manufacture' which would enable the firm to keep in touch with the progress of the country and the tastes of their large clientele. It was an unusual step for such a large firm: as recently as 1888 several large drapery businesses insisted that, despite the high tariffs, it was still cheaper to import goods than to manufacture the same articles in Queensland, and that the same quality of goods could not be produced in Queensland as in Britain. Nevertheless, the firm applied for registration of a trade mark in 1891 and in 1892 began manufacturing brands such as the 'Manx moleskin' trousers and 'Thistle' shirts. When the partnership of Stewart and Hemmant was officially dissolved in 1893, Alexander Stewart entered into partnership with sons John Killough Stewart and Charles Tait Stewart, as merchants and warehousemen trading as Stewart and Hemmant. By the mid-1890s it had become a major manufacturer of clothing and hats in Brisbane and had such a reputation for 'fair and equitable dealing' that 'the name of Stewart and Hemmant has become an equivalent for despatch, integrity, and everything that is honourable in trade.'<sup>2</sup> This reputation, as well as its status as one of the one of the oldest and largest businesses in Queensland, set it apart from other clothing manufacturers. In contrast to most factories of the time, which hired around four workers, Stewart and Hemmant employed around 230 hands in 1896, paying around £200 a week in wages; 273 workers in 1898 who were paid a total of £13,000 a year; and around 350 in 1900. The Queen Street premises had been expanded and now fronted the entire block between Queen and Adelaide Streets, with the factory facing Adelaide Street.

Overcrowding in the Adelaide Street workrooms seems to have contributed to Stewart and Hemmant's plans for a new factory in the Valley. The extension of transport to the Valley, the expansion of nearby residential suburbs and the availability of large portions of undeveloped land made the Valley a viable factory location. The company purchased one rood and 37 perches in McLachlan Street, near the Ann Street cutting, from Thomas Skyring in 1897 and architect George G. Hutton designed specifications for a new factory 'that no one, official or otherwise, could possibly cavil at'. The factory was constructed in six months by builders Crawford and Cameron, and opened in 1898. It was a two-storey brick building 'of most approved design' and said to be 'one of the most effective and complete buildings of its kind in the Australian colonies.' Picked buff bricks adorned the walls fronting the street, while internally the building featured lofty ceilings, nine foot square windows and air ventilation, in consideration for the employees working in the Queensland climate. Articles published on the opening of the factory in 1898 boasted that '[a] general feeling of comfort and coolness pervades the whole establishment,' as 'the health and comfort of their employees was the first consideration'. The building also had five-foot wide staircases and two elevators. Photographs published at the time show that the building also featured a large sign on the roof, 'Stewart & Hemmant Clothing Factory'.

Brisbane's industrial growth continued and by 1901, 1,103 factories had been registered, although few were as large as Stewart and Hemmant. Despite the introduction of the most modern equipment such as cutting and sewing machines and gas irons, the process of clothing manufacture was still very labour intensive around the turn of the century. Workers were divided into specialised jobs including cutting, trimming, sewing, hemming, stitching, button holing, button sewing, pressing and folding.

Demand for Stewart and Hemmant's goods grew to such an extent that it was considered necessary to build additional warehouse facilities adjacent to the factory. This warehouse, initially used as a hat factory, faces McLachlan Street and bears the date 1905 on its parapet, and is listed as a separate heritage place. Further expansions occurred in 1905 and 1909, this time to the Marshall Street frontage. The original factory, which had been delineated by two triangular pediments, was extended and a tower built. These additions were designed by architect Claude W. Chambers and built by Blair Cunningham.

In 1903 Stewart and Hemmant became incorporated as Alexander Stewart and Sons. Alexander Stewart managed the company almost until his death in 1918. The company Alexander Stewart and Sons continued until it went into voluntary liquidation in 1926. It had been operating for over 60 years and was one of Brisbane's oldest companies.

Towards the end of 1928 the former clothing factory gained a new tenant, printing company W.R. Smith and Paterson. William Ritchie Smith had established the business in 1902, later partnered by Robert Paterson. The business became a company in 1922 and operated from premises in the city until its warehouse was resumed in 1928, in order for Adelaide Street to be widened. Smith and Paterson set up its printery in the factory, purchasing it in July 1929 after it failed to sell at auction in May. Tenants Hayloom Manufacturing Company leased the part of the building fronting McLachlan Street from 1930. The development of Kemp Place in the 1940s made the Smith and Paterson building highly visible, and a large advertising sign by Queensland artist James Wieneke was added to the entire side of the Ann Street frontage. Minor alterations to the cantilevered awnings and additions to the mezzanine floor were completed in 1951 and 1961 respectively. Smith and Paterson, which continues as a business, sold the building in 1982.

The building was altered in the 1980s and 1990s with Asian awnings along the Marshall Street frontage and an Asian roof on the tower, reflecting its use by current owners Balgownie Enterprises as an Asian Grocery import warehouse. This modification also demonstrates the strong presence of the Asian community in this part of the Valley.

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## 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:

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#### Historical

##### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

As it demonstrates the expansion of Alexander Stewart and Sons, which became a household name in Brisbane by the 1910s.

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## Historical

### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

As it demonstrates the development of Brisbane's secondary industries, particularly the importance of Fortitude Valley as an industrial area from the 1890s.

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## Representative

### CRITERION D

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

As it displays the principal characteristics of a factory built to allow for the conditions in Brisbane, particularly its large windows and high ceilings.

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## 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

For its strong association with the labour movement and the late nineteenth century improvements in working conditions.

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## Historical association

### CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

For its association with the prominent Brisbane based manufacturer, Alexander Stewart and Sons, which was one of Queensland's largest clothing manufacturers in the first decades of this century.

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## Historical association

### CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

For its association with George G. Hutton, who designed the building in 1898 and later became an assistant architect in the government's architect office (1913-22).

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## References

1. *The Queenslander*, 28 March 1896 p.31
2. Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit Citation August 1995
3. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 12
4. Barton, EJT (ed), *Jubilee History of Queensland*, Brisbane: HJ Diddams, 1909
5. Brisbane City Council, *Register of New Buildings*, 1904, 1909 (Brisbane City Council Archives)
6. Lawson, Ronald *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*. St Lucia U of Q Press, 1973
7. Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board Detail Plan No 154
8. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Picture Queensland
9. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 1860
10. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1870-1, 1874, 1876, 1880, 1886, 1893, 1904, 1928-9
11. *The Queenslander*, 1874, 1876, 1891, 1896, 1898, 1900
12. *The Argus*, 1926
13. *The Courier Mail*, 1933

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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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