

Heritage Citation

Stuartholme School

Key details

Addresses	At 365 Birdwood Terrace, Toowong, Queensland 4066
Type of place	School, Residence (group), Institutional / group housing
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Ecclesiastical, Free Style
Lot plan	L6_SP259867
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 17 May 2013 Date of Citation — November 2012
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical association

‘Stuartholme’ opened as a convent and school run by the Catholic Sacred Heart Order of Nuns in 1920. The main building was constructed between 1917 and 1920 to a design by Sydney architectural firm Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing and Company. The company went on to design a number of other outstanding buildings for the Catholic Church including the Villa Maria Hostel, Nazareth House, Corpus Christi Church and the ill-fated Holy Name Cathedral. The planned Romanesque building was not fully completed but contributed to the architectural domination of Brisbane’s hilltop sites by the Catholic Church and was used by the school until the site was appropriated for the US Army during WWII. The school returned to the site in 1944 and has remained there since.

History

The Stuartholme convent and boarding school for girls opened in 1920 on the site located in Toowong. The land was a smaller portion of 72 acres in the Enoggera parish which had been granted to Alfred and Julius Holland in 1868. The hilly site was set high above the surrounding landscape, some distance from the village of Toowong

and not far from the summit of Mt Coot-tha, then known as One Tree Hill and already a popular recreation area. The name 'Stuartholme' came from Richard Wingfield Stuart, who purchased a 57 acre block in 1882. 'Stuartholme' referred to Stuart's entire allotment, which he used for farming. A large house, also called 'Stuartholme', had stood on the site, but was reportedly hit by a comet and burned down in 1897.

After passing through successive owners, the site was bought in 1917 by Brisbane Archbishop James Duhig, who intended to use it for educational purposes. Duhig had embarked on a dramatic building program for the Catholic Church in 1912 which continued until 1927 and resulted in the establishment of a number of Catholic schools, convents, churches, chapels and hostels. The buildings, frequently situated on hilltops and highly visible, contribute greatly to Brisbane's landscape and are arguably among the best twentieth-century architecture of Brisbane.

The purchase of the Stuartholme site had been sparked by the Superior General of the Sacred Heart Order of Nuns Reverend Mother Janet Erskine Stuart, who had visited Australia in 1914. The Rev. Mother had made the proposal that the site be used as a school during her trip to Brisbane. One of the site's earlier owners and its namesake, Richard Wingfield Stuart, was her half-brother, although he had long since sold the site and had died early in 1914. The site's elevated position was also a likely part of its appeal.

The Sacred Heart Order was given charge of the school and repaid Duhig the £3000 purchase price. The Order, known also as the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was one of twenty Catholic orders brought to Brisbane during Duhig's period of service. Title passed to members of the Order in 1918 as joint tenants, then to trustees, and eventually to the Order itself in 1950.

Sydney architecture firm Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing and Company was employed to design the new convent and school. Founder Jack Hennessy was known to Duhig as a fellow Catholic and he had previously designed a number of Catholic buildings in New South Wales. The firm was later involved in the design of several of the Church's Brisbane buildings, including Nazareth House, the Villa Maria Hostel and Corpus Christi Church, as well as the uncompleted Holy Name Cathedral in Fortitude Valley.

The foundation stone for the convent and boarding school was laid by Archbishop Duhig in May 1919 and work began on the building. Although the building had not yet been fully completed, the Stuartholme school and convent was opened by Duhig and Apostolic Delegate Monsignor Cattaneo on 1 August 1920. The finished building was estimated to cost over £20,000, funded largely by the Order.

Like several of Hennessy and Hennessy's subsequent church designs, the convent and school was an eye-catching brick interwar Romanesque building. It was completed around 1921, and a visitor to the 'beautifully situated' Stuartholme in 1926 noted the 'beautiful chapel, the library, reception-rooms, and assembly hall on the ground-floor; and the airy dormitories and class rooms of the upper story [sic]. With its lofty ceilings, wide balconies, and cool breeze-swept corridors, it is readily believed that residents of the convent have had very little experience of the trying heat of Brisbane's summer'. The author was as much taken with the view as the building, writing that 'from the spacious balconies on one side of the majestic brick building glimpses of the Bay and its beaches are seen. On the opposite side the view comprises the forest country... while from the main entrance the spectator commands vistas of river and wooded slopes, with the city of Brisbane extending away into the distance.'

Only five students had been enrolled on the school's opening, but by 1940, enrolments had reached 36 students. On 15 July 1942, a survey of the site and facilities of 'Stuartholme' was conducted by Surveying and Property Officer J.B. Payne of the Commonwealth Government's Department of the Interior's Survey & Property Section's Works & Services Branch (Qld). The survey revealed that the site contained a large, brick convent, a gazebo, 3

tennis courts, a sports ground, 3 cultivated fields and a small cemetery, that was to be requisitioned by the US Army Medical Corps.

The nuns/teachers and the girls boarding at 'Stuartholme' were transferred to a small country hotel at Canungra near the jungle slopes of Mount Tamborine. There 'Stuartholme' school was temporarily re-established with the study room being the former hotel public bar. After the US Army established Camp Cable near Mt Tamborine for its 32nd (National Guard) Division, the nuns and their students moved again. The school relocated to the Grand Hotel at Southport where it remained until the end of 1944.

The US Army established its 42nd General Hospital at 'Stuartholme's' Toowong site. US Army engineers added new buildings to the site. The main brick convent building was given a timber extension to accommodate surgical wards. To facilitate the movement of stretcher cases, the US Army installed an elevator beside the new wards. The elevator tower was designed so that it did not overshadow the parapet of the original school/convent building. Two temporary buildings with Red Crosses painted on their roofs were constructed nearby. The one closest to the surgical wards and the tennis courts was the officers' quarters.

When the US Liberty Ship *Rufus King* sank on 7 July 1942, some of her cargo was US medical stores that were taken to the tennis courts at 'Stuartholme' for drying. US nurses worked at the hospital and were provided with special onsite facilities such as a hospital beauty parlour. American nurses hosted dances at 'Stuartholme'. Such dances (e.g. one held on 28 December 1942) were Officers-Only affairs. The 42nd General Hospital ran an Ear, Eye, Nose & Throat Clinic at 'Stuartholme'. The school's grounds, particularly its tennis courts and bushland settings and the wide verandahs were conducive to patient convalescence. Commanding Officer of the 42nd General Hospital's convalescent section was Captain Muller.

Around 1 April 1943, the 6th Army HQ ordered that all of its various Portable Hospital units (like a M.A.S.H. unit) were to be detached and to operate independently. The US 3rd Portable Surgical Hospital (3 PSH) was then assigned to its parent organization the 42nd General Hospital. The portable hospital was trucked from Camp Cable to Brisbane and reached 'Stuartholme' on 2 April 1943. At 'Stuartholme', the 3 PSH was occupied with hospital ward duty for the officers and hospital training for the enlisted personnel. In mid-May almost the entire personnel of 3 PSH were hospitalised with malaria. The 3 PSH began transferring to Townsville on 3 June 1943.

As the war progressed it was found that the hospital facilities at 'Stuartholme' were inadequate to deal with the number of patients being sent there. Larger hospitals were established at the US 6th Army's HQ at Camp Columbia, Wacol and along Nursery Road at Holland Park. By June 1943, most of the 42nd General Hospital's staff had moved to Holland Park. All US Army nurses (approximately 50) were transferred to accommodation at 'Stuartholme' in August 1943 with the gazebo becoming a popular spot.

The school returned to the site after the war, following the sale of the disposable buildings constructed for the US Army. Subsequent buildings have been added to the school, including a library wing (1986), Spruson wing (1992) and Joigny Centre (2003).

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 Catholic convent and boarding school established on a hilltop in 1920. It is evidence of the growing Catholic population of Brisbane and of Archbishop Duhig's expansion of Catholic Church buildings in Brisbane. It is also evidence of the occupation by the US Army of many sites across Brisbane when it was the Headquarters of Allied operations in the South West Pacific Area.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a purpose-designed convent and boarding school built in the early twentieth century.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as fine example of a brick inter-war Romanesque building with Gothic qualities designed by Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing & Co.

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 a school and convent run by Sacred Heart Order of Nuns and Catholic Church.

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

as a Catholic school complex established under Archbishop Duhig's expansion of Catholic Church property in Brisbane. It is also associated with wounded soldiers of the U.S. Army treated there during World War Two.

References

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4. *The Queenslander*, 1866-1939
5. *Courier-Mail*, 1933-54
6. *The Register (Adelaide)*, 1925
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8. Picture Australia
9. Stuartholme School: History (<http://www.stuartholme.com/default.asp?contentID=619>, accessed 25 Jan 2012)
10. Boland, T.P., "Sir James Duhig (1871-1965)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol.8*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duhig-sir-james-6034>
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12. DERM, Entries on the Heritage Register, Nazareth House [601391], Villa Maria Hostel [601929], Corpus Christi Church [601460], Holy Name Cathedral site

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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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