

Heritage Citation



Wynberg

Key details

Addresses	At 790 Brunswick Street, New Farm, Queensland 4005
Type of place	Mansion, House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Queen Anne
Lot plan	L10_RP91111; L1_RP91119; L4_RP42356; L2_RP49751; L3_RP42356
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — January 2011
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Masonry - Render

People/associations	G.C. Willcocks (Occupant); James Duhig (Occupant); McCredie Bros and Chambers - 1891-92 alterations (Architect)
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Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical association
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Wynberg is an ornate circa 1880s residence located on Brunswick St, the main thoroughfare from Fortitude Valley to New Farm. The house was purchased by GC Willcocks, a wealthy engineer and mining entrepreneur, in 1890. Willcocks commissioned the architectural firm of McCredie Bros. and Chambers to design substantial extensions in 1891-92. In 1925, Wynberg was purchased by James Duhig, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane. Since that time, it has served as the official residence of Brisbane's archbishop.

History

Wynberg is an ornate 19th century residence which was substantially extended in 1891-92 for George Charles Windsor Willcocks, a successful Brisbane civil engineer.

The site of *Wynberg* was part of twelve acres acquired by George Raff by Deed of Grant in 1854. Over an acre of this land was transferred to John Abraham, an assistant to Judge Lutwyche before being sold to Henry Bates Fitz of the Darling Downs in 1863. Postal records indicate that Fitz was living on his Brunswick Street property by the late 1870s. According to George Willcock's descendants, the original house on the site was replaced by a new brick residence with wide verandahs in the 1880s.

In 1890, Charles Willcocks purchased the property from Henry Fitz, allegedly for ?7000. At this time, New Farm had become one of the city's more fashionable suburbs attracting residents from the upper echelons of Brisbane society such as Charles Griffiths, the Queensland premier and judge. Willcocks added to his holding in Brunswick Street during the 1890s until he had increased the property to almost four acres. He named his new residence, *Wynberg*, after the site of his railway construction base camp in South Africa. The origin of the name is a Dutch-German term for "vineyard".

Willcocks was born in Devonshire circa 1857. He trained as a stonemason before travelling to South Africa as a young man and becoming a successful engineering contractor. He won several railway contracts including the duplication of the line from Capetown to *Wynberg*. After marrying a young widow, Mary Anne Craig, in 1883, he returned to England for a short time before emigrating to Queensland in 1885.

Willcocks quickly became one of Queensland's most sought after contractors, specialising in railway construction. Other building contracts included the laying of timber blocks in Queen Street for the Municipal Council in 1897-98, several drainage and sewerage systems in Brisbane, the construction of the All Hallow's wall in Ann Street in 1887 and the retaining wall along Coronation Drive in 1887. He also had interests in sawmills, copper, gold, tin and coal mines. Willcocks was an active member of Brisbane society serving as a member of the Royal Brisbane Hospital, the RSPCA and the Booroodabin Bowls. He was also a mason.

In the early 1891-92, Willcocks commissioned the architectural firm of McCredie Bros and Chambers to

substantially extend his home. The Sydney architectural and engineering firm of A.L. and G. McCredie admitted Claude Chambers as their Brisbane partner in 1889, initially to supervise construction of the Australasian United Steam Navigation Co.'s offices (now the Brisbane Polo Club). The partnership ended in 1893 and Chambers continued to practise in Brisbane and Sydney until his retirement in 1935. He designed several notable buildings in Brisbane such as Perry House (1910-13) and was instrumental in establishing the Queensland Institute of Architects in 1888. Chambers also designed four houses for Wilcocks in 1895 in nearby Moreton Street which were entered on the City Plan Heritage Register in 2000.

The major change to *Wynberg* in 1891-92 was a two-storey extension at right angles to the original house. Existing rooms were enlarged and Victorian style ornamentation such as marble fireplaces, decorative plaster ceilings and red cedar joinery added. Painted fanlights around the doors were adorned with his initials and portraits of his wife and daughters, Katie, Ethel and Hazel.

According to the Willcocks family, the grounds were also improved during this period with the construction of a substantial masonry and iron wall with sandstone gate-posts along Brunswick Street. A circular drive was added and the gardens landscaped with native shrubs and palm trees. Photographs of *Wynberg* from around the early 20th century show a horse and buggy standing on the circular drive and the house's residents relaxing in the well established gardens.

In the early years of the 20th century, *Wynberg* was a centre of social activity as Willcocks hosted functions for his business and political contacts and his daughters entered Brisbane society. A ballroom and silky oak staircase was added circa 1902 as well as decorative archways and iron Corinthian columns in the entrance and hallway.

After a successful life as a businessman and father of nine children, GC Willcocks died at home on 9 October 1916, allegedly as a result of his diabetic condition. The funeral procession left from *Wynberg* for Toowong cemetery. His company, GC Willcocks and Co ceased trading after World War I. Willcock's widow, Mary Ann and their daughter, Katie, continued living at *Wynberg*.

In 1924, Willcock's widow advertised *Wynberg* for sale in the Brisbane Courier. The advertisement described the house as a "large and substantial brick residence, containing every modern appointment and convenience". It came with one and a half acres of land, including a tennis court, stables and coach house.

Wynberg had already attracted the interest of James Duhig, the Archbishop of Brisbane who had reportedly made an offer of purchase to Mrs Willcocks around the time of her husband's death. In 1925, Duhig succeeded in buying the property, spurred by the imminent demolition of Dara for the construction of the ill-fated Holy Name Cathedral.¹ It was 1927 before Duhig moved to the new archbishop's residence and 1932 before the titles were transferred to his name.

Duhig made his own mark on *Wynberg*, importing antique furniture from an ancient Roman family and converting Willcocks' ballroom into the "Gold Room" where he would receive the "political and professional Establishment of Brisbane"² as well as notable visitors such as General Douglas Macarthur and Dame Nellie Melba. A chandelier was added to the Gold Room and the furniture of former premier, TJ Ryan, purchased for the dining room. A crenellated tower with a flagpole was added to the upper storey early in Duhig's residence whilst he was overseas. Later, in 1937, the Italian community of Queensland presented Duhig with a fountain of Carrara marble for the front garden, a copy of a fountain in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. *Wynberg* functioned as more than just the residence of the archbishop and other clergy. It played an important role as a social focal point of the Catholic church in Brisbane. Garden parties and other functions such as the launch of the first Catholic Women's conference in 1937 were held in the grounds and photographed for the pictorial pages of the

newspapers.

Later changes to the fabric of *Wynberg*, included the enclosure of the roof-top fernery in fibro (circa 1930s) and the eastern verandah to provide additional accommodation. In the 1940s, an addition was added to the western side of the house to provide rooms for the Parish Priest of New Farm. Another alteration made by Duhig to *Wynberg* was the addition of a small suite to the eastern side of his office (formerly Willcocks' bedroom) in the 1941 when his increasing age prevented him from using his upstairs rooms. The simple addition was designed by Duhig's nephew, architect Frank Cullen. In the 1970s, Cullen modernised the kitchen and the eastern verandah was reopened. Brisbane architect, Robin Gibson, added a chapel in the 1990s and redecorated the hallway, opening a doorway through the original brickwork onto the rear verandah. Both the upper and ground floors of the rear verandah have at some stage been enclosed.

Archbishop Duhig died at *Wynberg* in 1965 at the age of 94. His body lay in state at *Wynberg* before being moved to St Stephen's Cathedral. *Wynberg* has since been the home of several Brisbane archbishops.

Through these many physical changes to *Wynberg* layers of significance have been added to the site, from its beginnings as a 19th century New Farm home, to its incarnation as a grand private residence and, from 1925 to the present, as the official home of the Archbishop of Brisbane.

Description

Wynberg is a grand residence of rendered masonry construction which includes both single storey and double-storied sections. The front façade, visible through an imposing sandstone and iron gateway features a large bay with a decorative gabled roof, wide verandah with separate roof and a crenellated tower on the second storey. The western side of the original front section and the two–storied 1890s extension on the western side have ornate cast iron verandah balustrades.

The interior of *Wynberg* has many significant features including decorative glass windows and fanlights, ornate archways and columns at the entrance to the main stairway and ornate plaster ceilings. Of particular interest is the Gold Room in the north-eastern corner of the house which has wood panelling, decorative columns and a large carved mantelpiece around a fireplace.

The large grounds of *Wynberg* provide a fitting setting which includes a circular carriage drive and many mature trees including poincianas, jacarandas and palms. A very large fig tree shades the eastern side of the grounds. At the rear of the residence, views of the adjacent Catholic school and church provide an historical and visual context for the house.

The significance of the site includes the residence in its entirety and the extensive grounds, including the garden layout and mature trees, the front fence and gates and the fountain presented to Duhig in 1937. The timber garages near the eastern boundary are not considered to be significant.

The house has had several additions and alterations over the decades. (see history)

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 residence which demonstrates the social history and pattern of development of New Farm in the late nineteenth century when it was becoming a fashionable residential suburb.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a good example of a substantial elite late nineteenth century residence.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an ornate nineteenth century mansion with striking internal and external architectural features in a large landscaped setting with mature tree plantings and a carriage drive.

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 association since 1927 with the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane as the official residence of the Archbishop.

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 special association with GC Willcocks, a successful Brisbane engineer and businessman who made significant alterations to the house and with James Duhig, Archbishop of Brisbane, who purchased the site in 1925 and resided there until his death in 1965.

Supporting images



Unidentified photographer,
'Fountain in the garden of Wynberg, New Farm, ca.
1940',
John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

Wynberg, Brunswick Street, New Farm. The official residence of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane from early 1928, when it was leased to the Church and occupied by Archbishop James Duhig. The property was purchased by the Archbishop on behalf of the church on 06 December 1932. (Description supplied with photograph)

Wynberg's white marble fountain is a replica of a work by Verrocchio and was presented to Archbishop Duhig as a mark of appreciation from the Italians in Australia. (Information taken from: The Courier Mail, 20 February 1937)

References

1. The original gates of Dara were moved to the entrance of St Ambrose's Catholic Church on Enoggera Rd, Newmarket where they remain in situ
2. TP Boland, *James Duhig*, St Lucia: U of Q Press, 1986, p.206
3. Ball, Peter. Address given re Willcocks and Wynberg. Dec 2005. Typescript held at Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives (BAA)
4. Brisbane City Council Detail plan no. 188, 1925
5. Boland, T.P. *James Duhig*. St Lucia: U of Q Press, 1986
6. *Brisbane Courier*, 26 July 1924
7. Dept of Environment and Resource Management. Titles Office. Titles records
8. G. Greenwood and J. Lavery. *Brisbane 1859-1959: A History of Local Government*. Brisbane: BCC, 1959.
9. Lawson, Ronald *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*. St Lucia U of Q Press, 1973
10. Martin, Fr. Denis. Paper on Wynberg, Archbishop's Residence, 1998, cited in Fr
11. Tony Hallam, *George Charles Willcocks*. Typescript, 1999. BAA
12. Martin, Fr D. *Wynberg – A Short History*. Pamphlet compiled by Fr D Martin Archdiocesan Archivist, no date

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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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