



History and Heritage Series

Club's Current Premises

Early History and Heritage

Sourced primarily from the information contained in the Heritage Listing documents of Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM), Brisbane City Council, and the National Trust of Queensland.



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

Introduction

This Note summarises the early history of the Club's home for almost 70 years (ie our current premises at 183 Wickham Terrace) to provide a historical context of its environment and outlines the Heritage aspects of the buildings¹.

It is largely based on the information contained in the Heritage Listing documents of Department of Environment and Resource management (DERM), Brisbane City Council, and the National Trust of Queensland, and include photographs from the John Oxley Library collection, State Library of Queensland.

The National Trust Citation of Queensland Citation (BNE 1/233) was:

- Researched by: Judy Rechner and Marianne Moss
- Presented to the Listings Committee by: Judy Rechner
- Approved by the Listings Committee: 17 August 1999
- Ratified by Executive of The National Trust of Queensland: 30 August 1999

Summary

The United Service Club's premises are interesting in that they are of such different styles and appearance, although built by the same architect within a few years of each other. Both buildings are significant in illustrating the principal characteristics of the work of respected architect Claude William Chambers. In both buildings, aesthetic value is engendered by the quality of design, materials, detailing and workmanship.

The Club occupies both buildings (now joined): a c1907 timber house known as the Green House, and a masonry structure known as 'Montpelier' built c1910 on the site of an earlier three-storey masonry building also known as 'Montpelier'.

The buildings became the United Service Club premises in 1947 when new premises were needed urgently to accommodate the surge in membership following the end of World War Two. Before the Club purchased the properties in 1946 the existing and earlier 'Montpelier' buildings functioned primarily as a guest house, and the Green House was used as a residence and professional office.

Both of the buildings are important in demonstrating the evolution of Wickham Terrace as an elite street of middle class boarding houses and residences, schools, clubs, medical rooms and private hospitals, a pattern of development which commenced in the 1860s and was sustained well into the 20th century.

The United Service Club is comfortable in its surroundings with members across the decades placing high value on the Club's rich heritage, something we have committed to preserve.

The Club has established a fund, contributions to which are tax-deductable, for preserving our buildings and to assist in meeting the substantial annual cost of maintaining our beautiful heritage buildings.

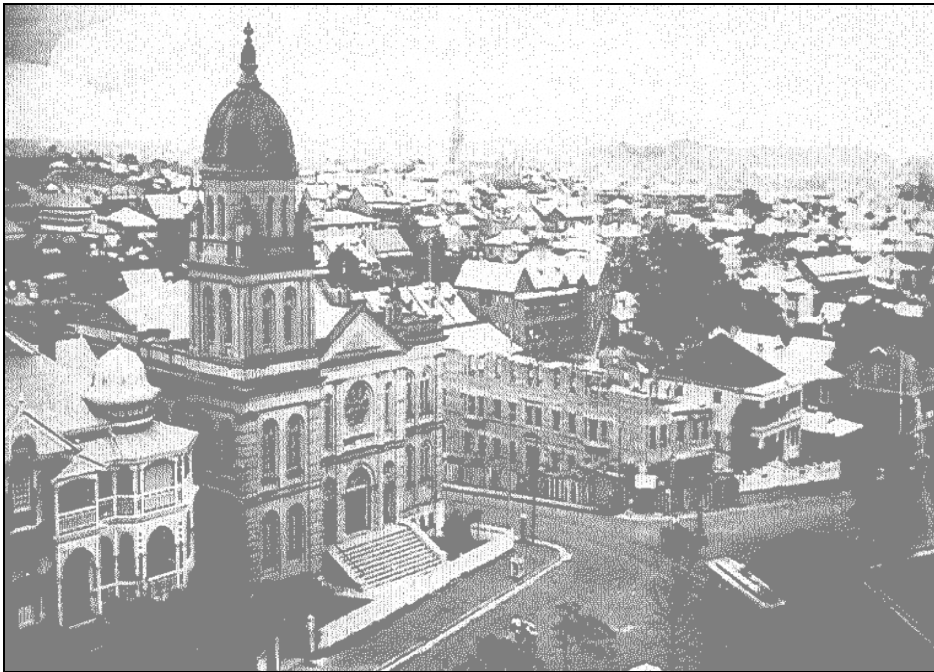
¹ *United Service Club Premises is a place that satisfies one or more of the criteria specified in s.35(1) of the Queensland Heritage Act 1992 and is listed in the State's Heritage Register (ID 601776). This summary is based on details at www.derm.qld.gov.au/heritage/registers_and_inventories/queensland_heritage_register.html It is also listed on the Brisbane City Council's Heritage Register, National Trust of Queensland - BNE 1/233: Register of the National Estate - 101896 (indicative)*

Heritage Significance

'Montpelier' and the Green House are significant for their contribution to the Wickham Terrace streetscape, with its range of important building types dating from the 1860s to the 1930s and the fine adjacent parklands. They are part of a tradition of use of the site and of Wickham Terrace, which is one of Brisbane's most prestigious streets.

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Wickham Terrace contributes significantly to the Brisbane townscape, and the United Service Club's buildings, so prominently located near the intersection of Wickham Terrace and Upper Edward Street, are important elements in the Wickham Terrace streetscape and contribute significantly to Brisbane's townscape



Note the tram in Upper Edward Street, and the very tip of the dome of Brisbane Meteorological Station and Observatory opposite the Green House (c1923) JOL 182797

The Green House is a Federation-era timber residence which is important in illustrating the principal characteristics of a distinctly regional, climate-responsive style of architecture. Erected 1906-07 as residence-cum-professional rooms and first let to a medical practitioner, it illustrates a pattern established in the 1860s whereby Wickham Terrace was a popular location for medical men who generally practised from their own home. The association of the Terrace with the medical and allied professions continues to this day.

'Montpelier', purpose-built in 1910 as a large boarding/guest house or private hotel, demonstrates the continued popularity of Wickham Terrace with the affluent middle-classes as a residential location. The building's continued use as accommodation is important in illustrating this aspect of the history of Wickham Terrace.

Both buildings are significant also in illustrating the principal characteristics of the work of respected architect Claude William Chambers, who had one of Brisbane's largest architectural practices in the early 20th century and who was the architect of both the Green House and Montpelier.

The Green House is a fine example of his domestic work, and Montpelier, the former private hotel/boarding house, is important in illustrating the skill and breadth of Chambers' commercial work.

In both buildings aesthetic value is engendered by the quality of design, materials, detailing and workmanship.

Historical Context: Early Brisbane

The settlement of Brisbane was established as a penal colony in 1825, and while it remained as such for less than twenty years, no land was alienated from the Crown until 1856.

In this year, portions of Spring Hill were sold in one-acre lots.



Wickham Terrace, looking east, in 1860. Edward Street is the unsealed track on the right hand side of the photograph, Ann Street near the summit of the hill in the middle distance.

JOL 6227

Wickham Terrace

During the 1860s and 70s Wickham Terrace, being close to the city, but elevated with pleasing rural vistas and cooling breezes, soon became an ideal location and quickly became popular with aspiring professional and business families as they built houses for rental and as lodging-houses, following the sale of land in the 1850s.

During the 1860s and 1870s, Wickham Terrace was evolving into an area of boarding houses and homes, schools, clubs and medical rooms². Post Office Directories show that from the 1880s to the 1940s many of those living on Wickham Terrace were single or married tradesmen and professionals.

According to the *Brisbane Courier* of 18 December 1863 many new buildings were going up in Spring Hill. One was 'Montpelier', a pair of large semi-detached villas on Wickham Terrace beside the Albert Street Wesleyan Methodist minister's home. This three-story masonry house soon became a guest-house.

² The tenor of The Terrace started changing in the 1920s with the introduction of purpose built medical offices and medical men moved their families out to the suburbs. Several of the oldest boarding houses, such as Gowrie House, remained until the 1970s.

Original 'Montpelier'

The Deed of Grant for the land on which 'Montpelier' and the Green House were to be built was issued to William Wilson on 29 January 1856. Title to the property subsequently transferred to Anglican Archbishop Edward Tufnell in February 1864, coinciding with the construction of the original 'Montpelier'. The original 'Montpelier' was built in 1864 as a pair of large semi-detached villas beside the Albert Street Wesleyan Methodist minister's home. Designed by Benjamin Joseph Backhouse, the two storey house with a hip roof and no verandahs soon became a lodging house. On 1 April 1865, an advertisement for the lease of a *highly eligible and pleasantly situated two-storey brick house, situated on Wickham Terrace, near the Observatory*, was included in the *Brisbane Courier*. It is likely that 'Montpelier' is the building being described in the advertisement.



Wickham Terrace looking west c 1900. The Baptist Tabernacle was opened 12 October 1890. The original 'Montpelier' is visible to the left of the Tabernacle but the Green House had not yet been built. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland (6361-0001-0009)

During Archbishop Tufnell's ownership of the house, Lady Musgrave Lodge was founded in 1885 by the wife of Governor Sir Anthony Musgrave, using 'Montpelier' as a boarding house to provide accommodation for young women from 1888 until moving to the rear of 121 Wickham Terrace in 1892, and later to Astor Terrace³.



From the backyard of the original 'Montpelier' (extreme right), looking south-east, c1890-1900. (Taken from about the Jacaranda trees at the edge of the upper level of today's car park). It is not known if the ladies – shown playing Rounders, La Crosse or Cricket – were from Lady Musgrave's Lodge that used the original Montpelier between 1888 and 1892 or (more likely) from the girls' school conducted in the Tabernacle next door (later to become All Hallows). The Green House was built after this photograph was taken.

³ The Lady Musgrave Lodge Committee was the initiative of a group of Brisbane women who felt that there was a need to provide a good home for working women and girls in Brisbane. It was named for its first patron, Queensland Governor's wife, Lady Lucinda Musgrave. The committee raised and administered funding to support the lodge where respectable young women could 'take rest or board while waiting a new situation.' Primarily designed to be a first port of call for young emigrant women arriving in the colony, it was also a place to stay for local working women and girls between jobs.

William Davies⁴ bought the property as an investment in 1897, after his success on the Gympie goldfields. It remained in the Davies family until purchased by the United Service Club almost 50 years later⁵.

In the 1880s eccentric retired merchant and investor Nehemiah Bartley lived in part of a boarding house at this address. Bartley⁶, who called his reminiscences *Opals and Agates*, was renowned for wandering Queen Street attired in a pith helmet or old plaid shawl.



C1900. The original Montpelier in the background of a photograph of Clement Wragge and meteorological instruments in the Meteorological Station opposite Montpelier.
JOL 43968

The original 'Montpelier' was replaced in about 1910 with the existing three-storey masonry building which continued the name 'Montpelier'. The new brick boarding house was constructed for William Davies. The architect was Claude William Chambers.

⁴ Davies left his native Wales for Australia when he was eighteen, firstly attracted to the gold fields at Ballarat, then moving to Gympie, where he made his fortune in the gold fields.

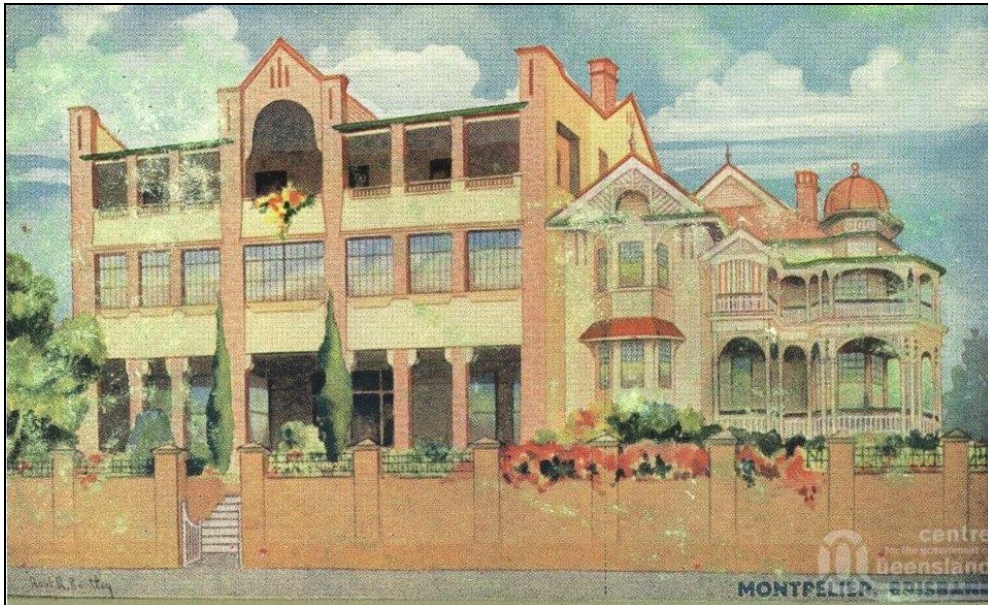
⁵ The search for a new premises for the Club was proving fruitless and the situation was becoming desperate when, the Club's President (Lieutenant Colonel Little) met Major Maldwyn Davies, a Club member in the street one day. Davies mentioned that his family owned a property in Wickham Terrace which might be suitable and added that he and his sister, a Mrs Dempster in Western Australia, were trustees of their father's estate. Davies told Little that he would accept a reasonable offer and would try to persuade his sister to sell if the Club was interested. Mrs Dempster eventually agreed to sell. See the separate Note for the story of the acquisition process and the refurbishment of the premises by the Club.

⁶ Nehemiah Bartley (1830-1894), merchant, was born at New Cross, London. Said to have been the first commercial traveller in Queensland, he combined business with adventure by collecting orders on horseback in the Darling Downs and Burnett districts where squatters became his friends as well as his clients. Perhaps his most profitable enterprise was a franchise on Chilean flour which he imported for £11 a ton and sold for as much as £50. In the 1870s and 1880s he was one of Brisbane's best-known eccentrics and could often be seen in Queen Street wearing a pith helmet or an old plaid shawl according to the season, and riding an old roan mare who found her own pace. A long quarrel with the Real Property Office led him many times to seek the appointment of a select committee; one parliamentarian declared him a more intolerable nuisance than 'the thistle or the Bathurst burr'. In 1892 at Brisbane he published *Opals and Agates*, reminiscences and observations based on his early life in Queensland. When he died suddenly in Sydney on 10 July 1894 he was preparing *Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences*; edited by John Knight. It was published in 1896. Bartley's wealth of information, gifts as a raconteur and comments on contemporaries reveal a powerful memory and a useful insight into the behaviour of others.

Present 'Montpelier'

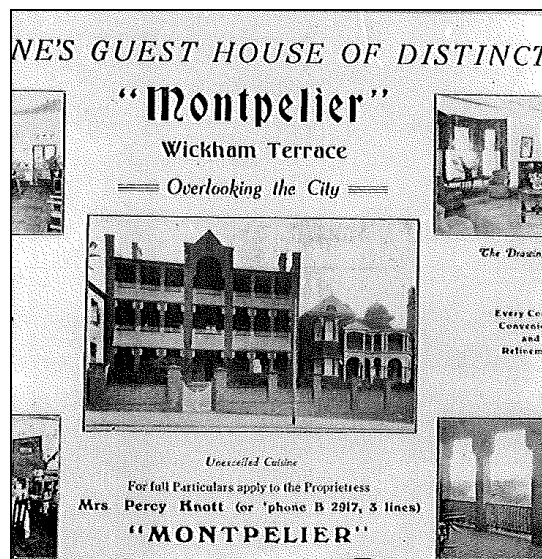
The heritage listing document comments that it is possible that a portion of the 1864 villa was retained and incorporated into the c1910 'Montpelier'⁷ but the photographs that show the original building (esp its chimneys) suggest that this is unlikely.

The current 'Montpelier' building demonstrates stylistic elements of Federation Arts and Crafts architectural style, and has some handsome interior details. Importantly, 'Montpelier' is significant in illustrating a now-rare example of its type: an early 20th century purpose-built, middle-class private hotel or boarding/guest house. Until the United Service Club obtained the Wickham Terrace property in 1947, 'Montpelier' was used almost continuously for the provision of boarding house style accommodation.



Montpelier Guest House 1930s (note that the two buildings are not connected)

Widow Annie Mabel Forsyth leased 'Montpelier' in 1910 paying £800 per annum. The cost of the lease had increased to £1,500 per annum by 1923 and to £1,855 by 1933. These leased premises were used as a first-class private gentleman's hotel, and were so exclusive, that gentlemen (even distinguished and senior business executives) needed references to obtain lodgings.



*Advertisement for Montpelier as boarding house c1932
(Courier Mail (?) Souvenir and Official Tourist Guide-Southport and Districts) JOL 64658*

⁷ The brick facade provides some evidence of early nineteenth century extensions to the 1860s core. On the eastern facade of *Montpelier*, the line where the stone and the brick meet can be seen, showing evidence of quoining. The historical photograph of *Montpelier* shows that the original building had quoining. Consequently, it is possible that the brick facade is an early twentieth century extension of the original stone building.

In 1940, Miss 'Molly' Sheahan purchased the hotel's lease. She had been a former private secretary to politician RM King.

'Montpelier' was not listed in the Post Office Directories during the Second World War, because it was commandeered by the US Army as accommodation for officers of field rank. Miss Sheahan remained as manager.

One of the long term residents of this period was Colonel Johnston, personal physician to General Douglas MacArthur.

A US officer, who had stayed in Montpelier during the war, recalled on a post-war visit to Brisbane that it was a well-made building with a long verandah on the second floor which gave, in those days, a view of the river. The features which he remembered were all qualities which attracted the Club to the building, but sadly, the sweeping city and river views have now been all but built-out.



*Looking east, c1939, with the present Montpelier on left and Meteorological Station/Observatory on right
Some idea of the 'city views' can be noticed. (JOL 53778)*



From Upper Edward Street, (c 1930s?) when there were still city and river views from the buildings.

The Green House

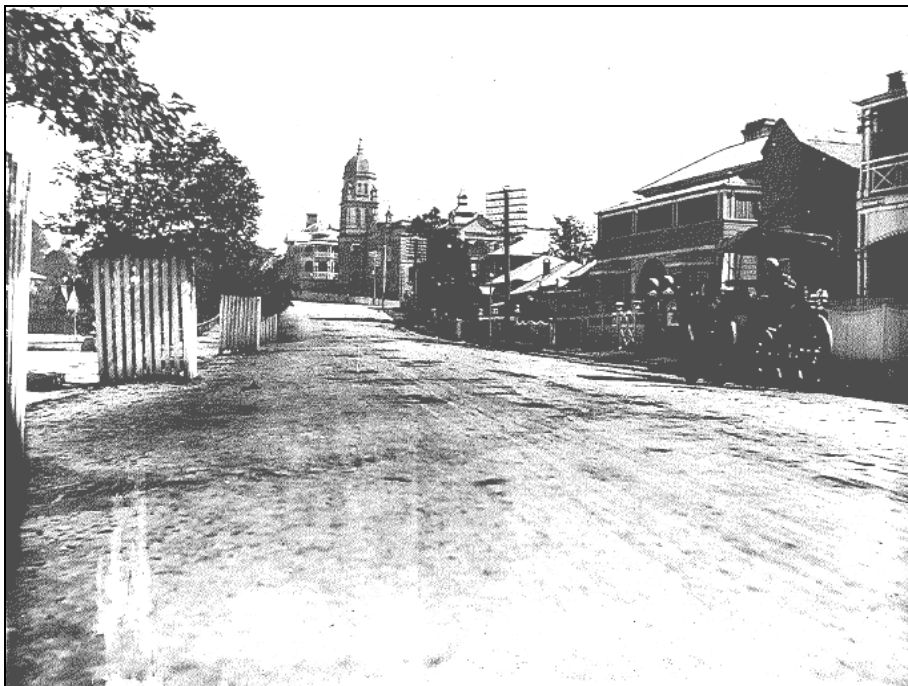


The Green House 2008

The Green House⁸ was erected in 1906-07 as residence-cum-professional rooms and was first let to a medical practitioner. It illustrates a pattern established in the 1860s whereby Wickham Terrace was a popular location for medical men, who generally practised from their own home. The association of Wickham Terrace with the medical and allied professions continues to this day.

It is important in illustrating the principal characteristics of a distinctly regional, climate-responsive style of architecture with polygonal bays and widened verandahs, abundant carpenter decoration, and beautiful and unusual flying gables. It is important also in illustrating a class of place (viz residence-cum-professional rooms) once common along Wickham Terrace.

The Green House is an ornate two-storey timber and brick building with an asymmetrical façade and a multi-gabled roof in painted corrugated iron. It has a projecting gable and faceted bay with an octagonal domed roof on the southern elevation and a second projecting bay along the eastern elevation.



Wickham Terrace looking west, c1907, with the Green House visible behind Tabernacle. (JOL 39110)

⁸ Commonly known as the *Green House* since it was purchased by the USC because that was its colour in 1946. Its original name (if any) is not known, but it has made decisions about colour selection for its repainting easy.

Internally, the Green House is lined in tongue-in-groove timber panelling, with a picture rail. The Green House is now joined to 'Montpelier', and a door, accessed from the joined ground level verandahs of the buildings, provides an entry to both. The upper floor is used as commercial offices and the ground floor of the Green House contains the Moreton Room and the Norman Pixley Room on the eastern side, and the Military Bar on the western side.

A mark is evident on the Green House's ground-floor verandah floor. It indicates where a wall had previously been placed. The wall marked the point where the 'Ladies Section' began in the days when women were not allowed in the United Services Club.

Close inspection will reveal, in places, the remnants of what are thought to be supply lines for the original gas lamps.



'Montpelier' and the Green House in 2008

Heritage Listing

The buildings are recognised for their Heritage values by both the State Government and Brisbane City Council.

A copy of the Entry in the Heritage Register (State Heritage Place) is held in our records.