

Local Heritage Register: Croker and Sons



Croker and Sons Building, 1939, SLQ image

Building Name:	Croker and Sons
Street Address:	51-53 Wood Street
Property Description:	Lot 1 on RP707027
Land Area:	415m ²

Description

The site was occupied by the prominent motor business of James Croker and Sons and today, plays an important role in the heritage streetscape.

History

The Croker Family were important members of Mackay's business community. Interests included shipping, fuels and motor vehicles. The family business started as shipping agents for the Adelaide Steamship Company in 1891 (see the Fact Sheet for 60 Victoria Street). This part of the business included permanent warehouses and wharves on the River.

Following James Croker's death in 1927, his sons Raymond and

Arnold Croker maintained the business and continued the Croker legacy. The Crokers invested in various businesses and property within Mackay, and expanded their reach into fertiliser and other bulk goods.

Mr Alan Shepherd (ex Shepherd Anvil Stores) was taken on as a partner in 1938. The business continues to trade today.

Raymond passed in 1943 and Mrs James Croker survived until 1944 at the family home "Bona Vista". The remaining son, Arnold passed away shortly after in 1948 leaving two sons: James and Arnold.

The Building

The building was built to accommodate the showroom, offices and workshops for motor and machinery agents for Ford, Dodge and International trucks held by Crokers. It was originally planned to proceed in 1929, but was not opened until 1934. The opening was celebrated by the general public, with particular excitement about new technology. The newspaper reported the presentation of a new vehicle featuring an inbuilt wireless!

The premises was a 'motor service station' with fuel bowsers located on the footpath (see plate above).

The building was constructed by Archie McDonald, and was based on modern Spanish design, with the outside walls finished in cement plaster. The roofing consists of Spanish-pattern tiles, and the ceiling was made of decorative fibrous-plaster. The recent refurbishment highlights

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the original shape and functionality of the building where vehicles could drive into the workshop under the extensive spanish-style awning. The building was purchased by Eagers Pty Ltd in 1945 as agents for General Motors Holden with Mr Hugh Corley as the first manager. In recent decades the building housed the Silver Bird Restaurant and was purchased by a local business in 2016. Modifications in 2017 have exposed the original showroom space (see plate right).



Croker and Sons Building, 2017, Mackay Regional Council collection

Statement of Historical Significance

Criteria	Significance
A: Historical significance	Constructed to accommodate the showroom, offices and workshops for motor and machinery agents, James Croker and Sons this building was of modern Spanish design when it opened in 1934. James Croker and Sons was established in Mackay in 1889, and as agents for the Adelaide Steamship Co Ltd the firm controlled the shipment of the whole of the district's sugar output. With the introduction of the motor car, the firm branched out into the motor business, and was also later responsible for the establishment of Mackay's first ocean oil terminal, both of which had direct economic benefit to Mackay.
B: All aspects of heritage significance	Does not meet this criterion.
C: Scientific significance	Does not meet this criterion.
D: Architectural significance	Does not meet this criterion.
E: Aesthetic / architectural significance	The building has undergone alterations including removal of the Spanish tiles, decorative cement plaster finish to the parapet, however the awning and parapet form remain which contribute to the low scale character of this part of Victoria Street. Recent building refurbishment also indicates that there is potential for early building details and finishes to remain under modern cladding which would further enhance the streetscape appeal of the building and expose original form and function.
F: Aesthetic or other significance	Does not meet this criterion.
G: Social significance	Does not meet this criterion.
H: Historical significance	The building has a special association with the firm James Croker and Sons who were largely responsible for the establishment of Mackay's first ocean oil terminal, which had great economic benefit to the region. In particular the building has special association with James Croker's sons, Raymond and Arnold Croker who, following the death of James, were responsible for the establishment of the building and continuing the Croker legacy in Mackay and the surrounding region.

References:

- Daily Mercury, 'James Croker & Sons', 24 December, 1938, p.6
- Daily Mercury, 'Obituary, Mrs James Croker', 3 August, 1944, p.2
- Daily Mercury, 'Correspondence' 24 July, 1945, p.5

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