

# Torbreck

## Place Details

Place ID	601256
Registration Type	State Heritage
Place Name	Torbreck
Place Classification	Landscape Built
Place Category	Residential
Place Type	Home unit/s
Themes	6 Building settlements, towns, cities and dwellings / 6.4 Dwellings
Register Entry Date	17/12/1999

## Location

Address	182 Dornoch Terrace
Town / Suburb	HIGHGATE HILL
Post Code	4101
LGA	BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL

## Cultural Heritage Significance

Principal Period of Significance	1950s (fabric, historical) 1950s - (social)
Criterion A	Torbreck has historical significance as the first company-titled multi-storeyed home unit development erected in Queensland based on 1950s North American models. The construction of Torbreck pioneered the market for this type of home unit development in Queensland.
Criterion D	Torbreck is of architectural significance as a well designed example of multi storeyed home unit building, particularly

	in its site planning and detailing. The Torbreck complex is a good example of 1950s architectural and landscape design in its form, attention to climate control and use of materials.
Criterion E	Torbreck has aesthetic and social significance as a prominent landmark of inner suburban Brisbane.
Criterion F	The Garden Block is an early use of lift slab construction in Queensland and is of technological significance.
Criterion G	Torbreck has aesthetic and social significance as a prominent landmark of inner suburban Brisbane.

## History

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Torbreck was erected in 1958-1960 to the design of Brisbane architects AH Job and RP Froud and comprised two stages; a low rise Garden Block to Chermside Street and a high rise Tower Block to Dornoch Terrace. Importantly, it was the first multi-storeyed home unit development in Queensland, constructed when Brisbane's Building Ordinances had no provision for home units, and advertised at the time as the greatest single contribution to home development in the state. When first promoted in 1957, the scheme received support from Premier Nicklin, who saw this high-density, inner urban residential development as an important contribution toward curbing Brisbane's urban sprawl. Torbreck Pty Ltd, which became Torbreck Home Units Ltd from mid-1960, was formed in 1957, and was headed by accountant Wilfred Charles Betts, builder Noel Austin Kratzmann, and solicitor Sholto Douglas. The aim of this company was to promote and construct a new type of Queensland residential accommodation; the multi-storeyed home unit complex. The original sponsor of the scheme was Rowley Pym, a former Western Queensland fencing contractor, whose grandmother is understood to have owned the first Torbreck, a c1876 house whose name meant top of the hill. Title to this Dornoch Terrace site was transferred to the company in mid-1958. The blocks facing Chermside Street were acquired in 1961-62. The home unit complex was designed by Queensland architects AH Job & RP Froud. Their work was influenced by post-Second World War International Style, particularly the North American model, which had a strong impact on architecture in

Queensland in the 1950s. WG Alexander & HV Browne were the structural engineers. Torbreck was erected by NA Kratzmann Pty Ltd, one of the largest building contractors in Queensland by the late 1950s. The eight-storeyed garden block was constructed using the lift-slab technique, whereby the roof and floors were prefabricated on the ground, then hoisted into position by jacks mounted on the vertical wall supports. This construction technique had not been used in Queensland before. The fourteen-storeyed tower block was erected along more conventional lines. Rowley Pym formed Torbreck Real Estate Brokers to market the new development, and most of the units were sold before the complex was completed. Purchasers paid a one-third deposit, then the balance was paid in four instalments during the construction period. Owners became investors in the company, receiving £1 shares in Torbreck Home Units Limited to the value of the purchase price. Directors of the company were, and still are, elected from among the unit owners. Despite strata title having been available in Queensland since 1965, Torbreck remains under company title. Torbreck introduced to Queensland a new concept in residential accommodation. The promotional literature offered Queenslanders a share of the American dream that had reached Australia via the Hollywood cinema: spectacular views, an acre of landscaped gardens, and luxurious, convenient, secure, private accommodation, with an estimated running cost to each owner of 10/- per week. Each floor was serviced by the latest in automatic lifts, and each unit owner was to be provided with a private garage and mail box. Each of the 150 home units was designed with at least one private balcony, and was fitted with built-ins, electric kitchen, two telephone connections (bedroom and lounge), sewerage and garbage disposal facilities, washing machine and clothes drier. Water, pumped from the city reservoirs to large storage tanks on the roof, was treated by the latest in American water-softening equipment. Television reception was available, and a swimming pool was constructed in the grounds. Due to spiralling construction costs and/or lack of Brisbane City Council approval, some of the more elaborate aspects of the scheme had to be abandoned: shopping facilities and professional suites at ground level; basement laundry service; a top-class restaurant offering room service; a terrace cafe; roof and indoor gardens; and

a tennis court, putting green and fully equipped children's playground. A planned rooftop observation lounge translated as an enclosed rooftop viewing deck. However, the project captured public imagination even before construction commenced. By May 1958, 'Torbreck' had become the most popular lottery syndicate name in Brisbane. By mid-1959, the developers were sufficiently confident in the success of Torbreck to announce preliminary plans and schematic designs for Torbreck-Surfers Paradise and Torbreck-Burleigh. Neither of these developments eventuated, but Torbreck opened the Queensland market for home units. Other projects to follow included Camden along Kingsford Smith Drive, Glenfalloch in New Farm, and Kinkabool at Surfers Paradise. In order to market the property, the developers Reid Murray Developments Pty Ltd published a small brochure detailing the attributes of Torbreck and providing floor plans to the seven types of flats available in the tower block. This document recognises the 'commanding and panoramic views of Brisbane, coupled with the full benefit of cooling breezes' offered by the units. In 1962/1963 the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Queensland Chapter) awarded AH Job and RP Froud with a commendation for the Garden Block at Torbreck. The partnership were awarded other RAI A awards including for Residences of a High Standard for the McDough Residence, Fig Tree Pocket also in 1962/3; and a commendation for the Lane Residence, St Lucia in 1965.

## Description

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Prominently located on the crest of Highgate Hill, Torbreck is a landmark, visible from many places in Brisbane. It comprises two modernist-influenced reinforced concrete and brick buildings on a one and a half acre site which slopes steeply to the north. The tallest is a fourteen-storeyed Tower Block which fronts onto and is accessed from Dornoch Terrace; it sits on four levels of garages and storage areas, and is crowned by a glazed observation room. The Tower Block links at foyer level to the top floor of the Garden Block. The Garden Block is eight-storeyed; it fronts onto lawns and a pool, and is also accessed from Chermside St. The stepping of the buildings on the site optimises the northerly aspect and views. The

external form of the Tower Block comprises vertically articulated concrete bays projecting out to the cardinal points from a brick core. It has full length verandahs to the north and south, and balconies facing east and west, including "Romeo and Juliet" balconies, angled out to catch glimpses of the southern views. The eastern and western bays have full height wide blue steel louvres flanked by textured concrete panels. The building rests on a concrete-louvred plinth, and steps up to meet the observation tower at its pinnacle. The garden block is a long rectangular building with verandahs to the north and walkway access to the south, which overlooks gardens with lawned areas, trees and a kidney shaped pool. It has brick walls to the east and west. All the brickwork on Torbreck is patterned and textured with projecting bricks. The Dornoch Terrace entrance comprises a tiled undercroft with substantial square columns, adjacent to a leasable space with a faceted glass wall. This entrance links, via a waiting lounge, lift lobby, corridor and concrete bridge, to a large concrete viewing terrace on the top storey of the Garden Block. The Garden Block is entered via a porte cochere and glazed foyer in the undercroft. Torbreck has 150 units, including bedsits, one, two and three bedroom units, and penthouse flats, with brick and reinforced concrete party walls. The Tower Block has a typical plan comprising four units forming a rectangle around a service core, with a single unit wing extending to the north and a double unit wing extending to the south. The typical plan of the Garden Block has seven adjacent units. The units are skilfully planned, optimising both space and views. The units have full-height timber sliding doors leading onto tiled balconies. The building contains some details which are well-considered in relation to climate and human occupation. The balconies and verandahs have concrete planters with sloped steel balustrades above, flanked by frosted glass panels, providing both privacy and views. Metal sunshades with louvres above the Garden Block balconies and louvres to the Tower Block assist in providing thermal comfort. The walkways to the Garden Block have different coloured chequered tiled floors to each level for orientation. The lift landings in the Tower Block also have different decor for different landing levels. All landing levels in both blocks have steel garbage shute doors and timber milk bottle hatches. The

observation tower has sloping glass walls which assist viewing, and contains a central stainless steel and brass direction dial. The observation tower commands exceptional 360° views of Brisbane and surrounds. Torbreck demonstrates design skill in its adaptation of the 'international style' to site, climate and human occupation, in its maximising the natural advantages of the site; sunshading and louvres, detailing of balustrades, remaining original lift landing features, and observation room. It also demonstrates a clear 50s aesthetic sensibility in its articulation of external forms, and its use of materials, in particular the use of texture in the brick and concrete work, and in its use of steel louvres. Torbreck remains substantially intact as an impressive Brisbane landmark.

## Element

Element Name	Torbreck
Designer Name	Job, AH & Froud, RP
Design Period	1940s - 1960s Post-WWII
Construction Period	1958 - 1960
Place Components	Furniture/Fittings Views from Garage Lawn/s Tower - observation/lookout Swimming pool Residential accommodation - home unit/s Direction dial Roof deck/terrace/promenade Views to Garden/Grounds

## Images and Maps

### Images

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