

Heritage



Rockfield

Key details

Addresses	At 19 Leopard Street, Kangaroo Point, Queensland 4169
Type of place	House
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Filigree
Lot plan	L10_RP11332; L11_RP11332; L12_RP11332
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2005 Date of Citation — October 2023 Date of Information — April 2011
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic

Built in 1892 on a prominent ridgeline, *Rockfield* is a rare example of a substantial late 19th Century Filigree in Kangaroo Point residence. *Rockfield* evidences the development of Kangaroo Point as a residential suburb and the continued popularity of homes overlooking the Brisbane River. The house demonstrates the picturesque and expressive key elements of the Filigree style, including the decorative filigree detailing and wide timber verandahs.

History

Rockfield at 19 Leopard Street is located in the residential suburb of Kangaroo Point, one of Brisbane's earliest suburbs that developed in the mid-19th Century. Kangaroo Point is located less than one kilometre east of central Brisbane. Kangaroo Point is bordered mainly by the Brisbane River and is positioned between Brisbane City, New Farm, East Brisbane, Woolloongabba, and South Brisbane. By 2021, the population of Kangaroo Point stood at 9,689.

The development of Kangaroo Point

The European development of Kangaroo Point began with the quarrying of Brisbane Tuff stone from the Kangaroo Point cliffs along the edges of the Brisbane River during the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement. The area was soon cleared for farming, with both farming and Brisbane Tuff quarrying continued into the free settlement.

The first land auctions in the area were held in 1843, the year after the first land auctions in north Brisbane. By the following year, the area's population had expanded enough that social institutions, such as hotels, were established. By the 1850s, Kangaroo Point had grown substantially, including approximately 80 houses, a wharf and ferry service to north Brisbane, and several industrial buildings. The area was still used for farming, although any open farm areas were beginning to be replaced by homes and businesses. The Kangaroo Point Ward was finally formed in 1865. The 1860s and 1870s also saw the suburb's expansion, including the establishment of several churches and schools. By 1871, the population rose to 1,020; by 1886, the population had more than doubled to 3,204.

During the 1880s, Queensland's economy developed rapidly due to government-sponsored immigration, increased exploitation of natural resources, and the adoption of new technologies in the manufacturing sector. At the same time, a substantial amount of foreign capital became available, with British financial institutions supporting large-scale operations such as mines and public infrastructure. The building of extensive public infrastructure encouraged an increase in Brisbane's population, dramatically growing to 88,000 by 1891. This increase in population further led to a massive demand for housing, fostering the subdivision of large existing blocks of residential land and the rapid building of new accommodations. Urban land development for residences in Brisbane, particularly the inner suburbs, was at a desperate pace and planned for continual population growth.

The residential boom continued through the 1880s until the 1890s saw a significant financial collapse and economic depression across Queensland. Several factors caused the downturn, chiefly international financial failures that caused the withdrawal of financial support from Europe, the emergence of a depression in the United States of America, and significant flooding across the state, particularly Brisbane, in 1890 and 1893. A large amount of residential land and homes in Kangaroo Point were destroyed, and unimproved residential land was forced to be converted into parklands, resulting in an approximate loss of 5% of the housing stock in southern Queensland.

The economic downturn caused several local financial institutions, deposit banks, and Queensland's largest and oldest bank, the Queensland Deposit Bank and Building society, to close their doors or enter suspended states.

Land values dropped dramatically without financial backing, collapsing to their lowest level by 1894.

The development and construction of *Rockfield*

In 1882, Thomas McIlwraith, Andrew McIlwraith, and Sir Arthur Hunter Palmer purchased Eastern Suburban Allotment 102 in Kangaroo Point. The land was transferred to Alfred Midgley and Roderick Morrison in 1885. Midgley and Roderick subdivided the land into suburban allotments and conducted a land sale. Gilbert Sang purchased a large section of land in 1888 and further divided and sold off individual portions.

On 17 July 1890, coal merchant Daniel McGregor bought subdivisions 10 to 12, a large land holding comprising one rood, 3.9 perches of cleared land along Leopard Street, on the top of the ridgeline overlooking the Brisbane River, backing onto River Terrace. River Terrace was described in 1875 as 'beauteous [...] with its unrivalled [view] of the great city'. *Rockfield's* large scale and decorative features indicate that McGregor was financial stable.

Rockfield, bought in 1892, was designed as a high-set Filigree-style residence. The Filigree style emerged from the popular Victorian Filigree style, featuring decorative cast-iron detailing for commercial and residential buildings. At the start of the Federation period (c.1890s), the popularity of cast iron for decorative detailing experienced a sharp decline, with timber becoming increasingly used for filigree details. Although timber posts, balustrades, brackets, and valences tended to be thicker than their cast-iron counterparts, new technological developments allowed for timber to be cut fine enough for a 'filigree screen' effect to be created.

Beginning in the United States of America, steam and later electricity allowed fine woodworking tools, such as bandsaws, jigsaws, and lathes, to be operated cheaply and efficiently, reducing the valences, balustrades, and latticework to be produced, which, combined with deep timber verandahs, provided shade to buildings while allowing cooling airflow around the core building. This style was quickly adopted across Australia, particularly in the hotter, more humid climates of Queensland, where it featured on large- and small-scale houses, and commercial buildings and was particularly popular on hotels and public houses.

On 6 March 1895, however, the Queensland National Bank Limited placed a caveat on the land, preventing a mortgage from being issued. This was the first official indicator that McGregor was in financial distress, with this restriction placed on a notable asset in his ownership. A month later, the Queensland Scottish Association organised a benefit concert to raise funds for McGregor, a club member. Newspaper articles in November 1895 announced that McGregor and his business partner Moses Ward faced insolvency before the Supreme Court. Finally, on 8 October 1895, the Supreme Court issued a Certificate of Insolvency to both McGregor and Ward. It was reported that the men had entered a new mining venture - purchasing the West Moreton Coal Mine - on expert advice. However, the mine was quickly discovered to be completely exhausted of any useful coal. Neither man made any profit, with Moses stating that they had been 'grossly deceived in regard to the value and prospects of the coal mining property.

Following McGregor's insolvency, *Rockfield* transferred into the hands of Theodore Unmack (as trustee) and then to The Queensland National Bank Limited on 6 November 1895. In June 1897, the furniture within *Rockfield* was auctioned off. Alfred A. Smith and his wife moved into *Rockfield* in 1897, with a notice appearing in *The Brisbane Courier* on 2 July, and stayed at the property until 1905. Over the following decades, the ownership of the house regularly changed.

While the rest of the suburb was subdivided into smaller residential lots, *Rockfield* remained relatively unchanged, a large home overlooking the river. In 1909, *Rockfield* was advertised for let. It was described as 'a nice villa residence containing dining rooms, 4 bedrooms, kitchen, servant's room, pantry; bathroom; gas and water; nice garden; splendid position, overlooking garden reach'. *Rockfield* was renovated in 1911, although the large scale and internal layout was retained. The Detail Plan of the area, issued in 1923, indicated that the footprint remained unchanged from the original configuration.

Rockfield was purchased by three unmarried children of the notable Lamb family, John, Dorothy, and Marjorie, who owned the large property *Home* adjacent to *Rockfield*. While no longer owned by the Lamb family, *Rockfield* retains its position on the ridgeline, overlooking the Brisbane River, and remains, a substantial and significant home.

During the early 2000s, *Rockfield* underwent several extensions, including the restoration and widening of the southern wing of the building for the addition of a garage, an extension of the northern wing, including to the verandahs, and an extension of the pediment at the front of the house. The concrete boundary fence was also installed, and a small timber structure was constructed in the site's southeast corner. Further, during the 2010s, minor landscaping works around the property included planting new grass and laying a new driveway onto Wild Street.

Description

Rockfield is located at 19 Leopard Street, Kangaroo Point. Sited on the prominent ridgeline of Kangaroo Point, *Rockfield* is located in an area consisting mainly of residential sites ranging in size from large to smaller homes and apartment blocks. St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and Primary School are located directly across Leopard Street. The building is bounded to the east by Leopard Street, to the south by Wild Street, and by *Home* (9 Leopard Street) to the north and west.

General description

Rockfield is a two-storey Filigree timber residence facing onto Leopard Street. The building is largely rectangular in plan, missing the southeast corner of the building. The corrugated metal roof has a multi-hip structure with narrow gutters. Two brick chimneys are evident on the roof of the structure, with one in the centre of the building and one at the southern edge, visible from Wild Street. A widow's walk (a roof-top platform bounded by railings) is located at the peak of a central pyramid-style roof section.

Entry to the place is by a set of non-original concrete steps and a concrete pathway leading to a timber frame and panel door. Additional verandah posts flank the front entrance, mirrored on verandah of the floor above. A decorative timber arch is located on the second-floor verandah floor above the location of the front door.

The building has wide timber verandahs to the north, east, and northwest sides. The verandahs feature decorative filigree capitals. Decorative mesh screen balustrades partially enclose the verandahs and have corrugated metal roofs that are separate from the roof of the building.

Both floors have evenly spaced, timber-framed doors and windows with clear glass panels. The exterior walls are clad in timber weatherboards. Small timber-framed, multi-paned sash windows are located on the south and west walls of the building, with timber awnings shading each window. Two roller garage doors open onto Wild Street at the south wall of the building. A wide concrete driveway connects to Wild Street.

The property is bounded on Leopard and Wild Streets by a non-original concrete wall, with cast iron fencing detailing between the concrete supports. A non-original hedge has been planted adjacent to this fence, providing some ground-level privacy from the street. Cast iron gates provide an entrance from Leopard Street, aligned with the house's front door. A small non-original timber structure is located at the southeast corner of the site.

Significant features

Features of cultural heritage significance include:

- Views to the house from Leopard Street
- Views from the house to the Brisbane river
- Original location, scale, form, and orientation of the house
- Original holding size and configuration
- Setbacks from front and side boundaries
- Cast iron gates from Leopard Street
- Two-storey and multi-hipped roof form
- Metal roof sheeting
- Widow's walk roof feature
- Brick chimneys
- Verandahs with timber floorboards, posts, brackets, and end joins
- Timber filigree balustrade
- Location of concrete steps to the verandah and front entry
- Original window and door openings
- Original windows and doors

Non-significant features

Non-significant features include:

- Non-original enclosed ground floor level
- Non-original small timber structure at the south-east corner of the site
- Non-original corrugated metal roller garage doors
- Non-original extensions to north and south wings
- Non-original concrete steps to verandah
- Non-original concrete driveway to Wild Street
- Non-original concrete and cast-iron boundary wall
- Non-original landscape plantings

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 large residential home built in 1892 on the ridgeline of Kangaroo Point, *Rockfield's* scale, form and location demonstrates the sustained development of Kangaroo Point as a residential suburb from the early days of Brisbane to just before the 1893 financial crisis. During the 1880s and 1890s, Kangaroo Point transitioned from a largely farming and mining suburb to a popular residential suburb. At this time, large houses were built throughout the area, particularly on the ridgelines. It particularly demonstrates the continued appeal of homes overlooking the Brisbane River, with much of the remaining suburb having undergone redevelopment into apartment blocks and smaller houses. During the 1910s and 1920s, many substantial homes within Kangaroo Point were

converted to flats, or lands were subdivided and converted to smaller lots and residences. *Rockfield* is significant as one of the few remaining large-scale residences in the area.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

Through its design and form, *Rockfield* is a rare early example of a substantial Filigree house remaining in Kangaroo Point. During the later 20th Century, Kangaroo Point has undergone extensive redevelopment with the emergence of apartment blocks and small-scale residences. Few substantial individual residences remain in the area, with other homes converted to flats or demolished to make way for smaller residential lots and apartment blocks.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

Rockfield, a Filigree residence, demonstrates aesthetic significance through its expressive attributes and its contribution to the streetscape. As identified in the citation description, *Rockfield's* scale, form, location and setting contribute to the streetscape, and the house is highly visible from Leopard Street. Expressive elements of *Rockfield's* built form include the hipped roof, widows walk, turned timber verandah posts and detailed capitals, decorative filigree balustrades and a decorative timber arch on the second-floor verandah above the central door. The verandah's arrangement and depth provide shade and air flow around the house. *Rockfield's* setting, framed by a tall concrete fence, topped with cast iron balustrades between concrete posts, along Leopard and Wild Streets contributes to the place's aesthetic significance. The front door of *Rockfield* is framed from Leopard Street by decorative cast-iron gates.

Supporting images

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Note: This information 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 information 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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