

Heritage Citation



Royal Bank of Queensland (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 458 George Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Bank, Shop/s
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L2_RP88494; L1_RP88494
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — January 2010
Construction	Walls: Masonry - Render
People/associations	Richard Gailey (Architect)

This building was erected in 1885 as two shops and subsequently leased to the Royal Bank of Queensland in 1888 for its branch office. The Royal Bank of Queensland was established in 1886 as a rival to the Queensland National Bank, both of which sought to keep local control of Queensland's development capital. The reason for locating the bank's branch in George Street was in response to the rise of upper George Street as one of Brisbane's major retail precincts during the economic boom of the 1880s. Since the closure of the George Street branch of the Royal Bank of Queensland in the 1920s, the building has been tenanted by a variety of retailers and in the 1960s and 1970s was again used as a bank. It is the only surviving example of a building associated with the Royal Bank of Queensland in Brisbane.

History

The Royal Bank of Queensland was launched in 1885 as a Brisbane-based bank to rival the Queensland National Bank (QNB) that had been established in 1872. When former QNB director Thomas McIllwraith became Premier of Queensland in 1879, he handed his government's accounts to the QNB. McIllwraith's political rival, Samuel Walker Griffith, was involved in establishing the Royal Bank of Queensland in order to counter the QNB's dominance of the colony's finances. The new bank was established during Griffith's first term (1883-88) as Premier of Queensland.

The Royal Bank of Queensland was one of six local banks and building societies, established during the period 1863-87, as safeguards for maintaining Queenslanders' control over their colony's finances. The other financial institutions were the Bank of Queensland (1863-66), the Queensland National Bank (1872-1948), the Queensland Deposit Bank and Building Society Ltd (1886-1931), the Federal Building Land and Investment Society United and Deposit Bank (1887-1931) and the Brisbane Permanent Benefit Building and Investment Society (1874-1970).

The impetus for the Royal Bank of Queensland came from thirteen prominent local businessmen and politicians, including Members of the Legislative Assembly William Miles, Francis Kates and William Villiers Brown. A prospectus for the Bank was published in 1885 and the Bank commenced operations on 2 February 1886 from leased offices at the corner of Creek and Elizabeth Streets. Griffith's political ally, James Thomas Walker, became the Bank's first manager and when Walker had to leave Queensland in 1887 to attend to family matters, Griffith's brother Edward became the Bank's second manager. Griffith's brother-in-law, F.M. Lascelles, became one of the Bank's auditors. The Royal Bank of Queensland started with four branches in Charters Towers, Gympie, Ipswich, Townsville and an agency in Morvern. By 1887 the number of branches had expanded to nine, located in places as diverse as Warwick, Rosewood, Croydon and Rockhampton.

The Bank's success, driven by Queensland's 1880s economic boom, prompted it to expand by opening additional branches in Brisbane in 1888. These were at 458-460 George Street, Brunswick Street in Fortitude Valley, the corner of Boundary and Vulture Streets in South Brisbane (now West End) and at the corner of Logan and Cleveland Roads in Woolloongabba (now Stones Corner). In 1891, the Bank moved

headquarters to its new building at 121 Queen Street. By the early 1890s, the strength of the Royal Bank of

Queensland was such that its assets of £1.4 million, when combined with those of the Queensland National Bank and the Bank of North Queensland, accounted for over half of Queensland's banking assets and 8% of Australia's banking assets.¹

The choice of sites for the Bank's Brisbane branches was dictated by the location of Brisbane's main retail precincts in the late 1880s. The opening of Brisbane's first railway station in Roma Street in 1873 influenced the development of the western (upper) end of George Street as a shopping precinct. This spurred projects such as the erection of the new Grosvenor Hotel at the Ann Street corner during 1881-82 and the Transcontinental Hotel in 1883-84 near the intersection of George and Roma Streets. Between these two hotels, a number of modest two-storey commercial buildings were erected for diverse businesses such as Sleath's music store, Langley's bootshop and tailors Duncalfe & Co. These shops serviced not only the staff and clientele of the nearby railway station and goods yards but also the people attending the Brisbane Municipal Markets that had been relocated to Roma Street in 1884. The location of a Royal Bank of Queensland branch on George Street in 1888 was indicative of the further development of this important precinct. The commencement of a George Street tram service in 1897 brought more customers to the shops there. From 1901 retailers McDonnell & East, operating from a succession of George Street buildings, dominated this precinct.

The building leased by the Bank at 458-460 George Street was built in 1885 as an investment property for Terence Byrne, of Mitchell. Prominent Brisbane architect Richard Gailey designed the two-storey masonry building which accommodated two separate shops. Flora Murphy's fruit shop and the Railway Coffee Tavern initially occupied these. The following year, D. Astill, bootmaker and a restaurant operated by Edward Donnelly, replaced these businesses. The Royal Bank of Queensland replaced the restaurant in 1888, taking the shopfront that faced both George and Herschel (then spelt Herschell) Streets. The bank vault still extant in the basement of the building dates back to the Royal Bank of Queensland tenancy though it may have been included in original construction in 1885.

The success of the Bank was affected by the onset of an economic depression in the early 1890s. In mid-May 1893, there was a run on the various Queensland banks that forced eight of the eleven banks to suspend payments and close. The Royal Bank of Queensland closed all of its 21 branches for a period of 82 days. Recovery was slow but by 1898 a degree of economic stability had returned to the colony. The Royal Bank of Queensland closed its George Street branch in 1910.

In 1917, the Royal Bank of Queensland merged with the Bank of North Queensland to form the Bank of Queensland. When the Bank of Queensland was taken over by the National Bank of Australasia in 1922, the National Bank of Australasia also acquired the former Royal Bank of Queensland headquarters in Queen Street. This was subsequently demolished to make way for a new National Bank headquarters that was constructed on the site (now 180 Queen Street) during 1929-30. The suburban branch buildings disappeared over the years and now the only remaining Brisbane building associated with the Royal Bank of Queensland is that located at 458-460 George Street. This building, the former Queensland National Bank (built 1885) and the ANZ Bank Building in Queen Street (1899-1900), are the only surviving nineteenth century bank buildings in the CBD.

After the closure of the George Street branch of the Royal Bank of Queensland the premises was used for a variety of purposes. From 1911-18, it housed W. Johns & Co. drapers, then Harold Aldridge's outfitters (1919), B. W. Allen's outfitters (1920-21), J. R. Sim's mercers (1922-32), and H. J. Beaumont's mercers (1933-49). In July 1950, the property was sold to the Bank of Australasia and the site returned to its original usage as a bank. The building had been sub-divided into two retail premises that both fronted George Street. So the Bank of Australasia occupied the corner spot and leased the other section of the building to McKenzies Shoe Shop. In September 1960, the building was transferred to the Australia & New Zealand (ANZ) Bank and it became an

ANZ Bank branch. It remained an ANZ branch until 1975 when the site was sold to Walcheren Pty Ltd. The other half of the building (458 George Street) also had many changes of tenancy. James McKenzie took over Astill's bootshop in 1892. Mathew Connors & Co ran the bootshop from 1897 to 1902 when James McKenzie returned to the building. His family purchased 458 George Street in 1950 and their shoe store was still operating from the building in 1972.

As with most commercial premises within the CBD, the former Royal Bank of Queensland building has undergone a number of internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different tenants. This is particularly the case with the ground floors of CBD buildings. Brisbane City Council approved alterations to the building in 1950 when it became McKenzies Shoe Store and again in 1954. The building's current fit-out as a Subway store occurred in 1996 and its other use as a 7-ELEVEN store began in 2000.

In 1986, the National Trust of Queensland published a heritage walk for the George Street retail precinct. In The Old Brisbane Markets Heritage Walk, the National Trust stated:

The combination of Victorian facades in George Street between Turbot and Herschell Streets combine to provide one of the most intact 19th century areas in Brisbane.²

In the ensuing twenty years, most of these nineteenth century buildings, such as the Druid's Temple, Blenheim House, Stafford House, Jackson's Buildings and Foresters' House, have been demolished. The former Royal Bank of Queensland Building is one of only four nineteenth century buildings left in this section of George Street, and along with the Langley's Building is the best example remaining within the streetscape described by the National Trust. Thus the former Royal Bank of Queensland Building is one of the few surviving remnants of the flourishing nineteenth century George Street shopping precinct.

Description

This prominent corner masonry building with its facade modelled by rendered attenuated pilasters, its unconventional order of architecture and parapet with decorative balustrade on skyline contains some strong elements of the Victorian Free Classical style.

The exterior of the building has been remodelled in the past. The verandah and supported awning were removed and only partially replaced with a suspended awning on the George Street façade. The three original windows on the first floor facing George Street were also removed and replaced with four windows. The rendered attenuated pilasters also appear to have been added to the building. These changes were, however, complementary to the original style.

The building has also undergone a number of internal changes over the years to accommodate the requirements of its different tenants. However, the bank vault that still exists in the basement of 460 George Street dates back to the Royal Bank of Queensland tenancy beginning in 1888 or to the original construction in 1885.

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 an 1880s bank building that was constructed during George Street's development as one of Brisbane's major retail precincts; and, as a building constructed for the now obsolete Royal Bank of Queensland.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as the only surviving example of a building associated with the Royal Bank of Queensland.

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

as a building designed by influential architect Richard Gailey.

References

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7. *The Courier Mail*, 1959
8. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
9. Environmental Protection Agency, File no. 600141 – National Australia Bank
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13. Joyce, Roger B., *Sir Samuel Walker Griffith*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1984
14. R. Lawson *Brisbane in the 1890s* Brisbane:University of Queensland Press, 1987
15. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
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17. National Trust of Queensland, *The Old Brisbane Markets Heritage Walk*, Brisbane, National Trust of Qld, 1986.
18. Queensland Government, *Queensland Centenary – The First Hundred Years 1859-1959, Queensland Centenary Souvenir*, Brisbane, Penrod Publishers, 1959
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20. Steer, G. R., *Brisbane - 50 to 60 Years Ago*, A paper presented to the Rotary Club of Brisbane, 12 November 1951
21. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994
22. www.bggs.qld.edu.au/houses/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory, Griffith House, accessed December 2006

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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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