

## Heritage



### Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade Sub-Centre (former)

#### Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 17 Colebrook Avenue, Moorooka, Queensland 4105; At 2 Mackie Street, Moorooka, Queensland 4105
<b>Type of place</b>	Ambulance station
<b>Period</b>	World War II 1939-1945
<b>Style</b>	Asymmetrical Hybrid
<b>Lot plan</b>	L1239_SL829
<b>Key dates</b>	Date of Citation — June 2025
<b>Criterion for listing</b>	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (H) Historical association

Designed by T.R. Hall and L.B. Phillips, the Honorary Architects to the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade (QATB), the former QATB Sub-Centre in Moorooka, contributes to our understanding of the development of Brisbane's ambulance service in the mid-20th Century. Purpose built in 1941 to meet the local area's needs, the

Sub-Centre emerged as a response to the industrial development of Moorooka, notably the Rocklea Munitions Works that was also built in 1941. Strategically located to provide improved rapid response to the local area, the Sub-Centre in Moorooka was the first sub-centre built to serve only a Brisbane suburb. The former Sub-Centre in Moorooka is the only known ambulance building built in Brisbane during the Second World War and remained in operation for more than 50 years until closing in the mid-1990s.

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## History

### A history of Moorooka

Moorooka, located around seven kilometres from central Brisbane, has been described as a post-Second World War suburb. Early settlement of Moorooka began in the 1860s when the land was sold off and used for agricultural purposes. The arrival of the railways in the 1880s saw the development of residential estates in Moorooka, such as the Moorooka Railway Station Estate. However, such land speculation overestimated the desire to live in the suburbs and commute into central Brisbane. In 1911, the population of Moorooka stood at just 350 residents.

Moorooka continued to grow between the First and Second World Wars and slowly developed from a rural area into a residential suburb. The population of Moorooka, including Salisbury and Rocklea, rose to 8,364 residents by 1947 due to the increased suburbanisation of Brisbane. Suburbanisation in Brisbane was driven by factors such as economic issues, infrastructure developments, population increase, and the role of government. For example, between the First and Second World Wars, developments in Moorooka's transport infrastructure included replacing horse-drawn transport with the trains, trams and eventually the motor car.

Moorooka's transport infrastructure changes encouraged further residential developments in the area as these modes of transport provided better links to central Brisbane. During the 1930s, the local population in Moorooka actively sought the extension of the Ipswich Road tram system down Beaudesert Road. *The Courier-Mail* recorded in 1934 that it was 'considered that the extension of the tramline was imperative for the progress of [Moorooka].' This local activism clearly illustrated the link between transport infrastructure developments and Brisbane's continued suburbanisation during the period. The tram line's extension into Moorooka proper opened in May 1937 and cost £18,000 to construct.

### The establishment of the Queensland Ambulance Transport Bridge

The City Ambulance Transport Brigade (CATB), established in 1892, was an important development in the history of the Brisbane's emergency services. From 1902, the CATB became known as the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade (QATB) to recognise its growing role within Queensland. The CATB had been formed to instruct 'persons rendering first aid,' 'the transport of the sick and injured' and 'the instruction of members in the elementary principles and practise of nursing and also of ventilation and sanitation, especially of the sick room.' In 1897, the CATB was gazetted under the terms of the *Hospitals Act*. As a rare example of a Second World War ambulance building, the former QATB Sub-Centre in Moorooka is important as it contributes to our understanding of the development of Brisbane's emergency services.

The CATB was formed after an incident at the Brisbane Exhibition in August 1892. A Mr E.G. Echlin fell and fractured his leg while competing in the Maiden Hunters' Cup. This event led to a meeting in September 1892 at the home of Seymour Warrian, a member of the Brisbane Ambulance Corps of the Queensland Defence Force who had viewed the August 1892 incident. Warrian had been frustrated at the response provided to Echlin's accident. At this meeting, it was decided to establish the CATB. Its first official meeting took place on 22

December 1892 in the original Courier Building on Queen and Edward Streets in Brisbane. The influence of the CATB went beyond the borders of Queensland. For example, by 1896, Warrian and two other members of the CATB had helped set up the Civil Ambulance and Transport Brigade in Sydney.

The QATB was established as a charity. Throughout its history contributions from the public had ensured access to the Brigade's services. At the same time, non-contributors had to pay to access the ambulance service. As well as public donations, the QATB was financially supported by the government. Funding was also provided by other means, such as regular fundraising efforts in *The Courier-Mail's* pages. For example, in December 1950, money raised by *The Courier-Mail* through their weekly 'Find the Ball' competition helped fund the purchase of '[s]ix modern "E and J" resuscitators.'

## **The Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade and the Rocklea Munitions Works**

As well as being significant in illustrating the growth and development of the QATB in the Brisbane area, the construction of the Sub-Centre on Colebrook Avenue was linked to the industrial development of the Moorooka and Rocklea areas. Of specific importance was the erection of the munitions works in Rocklea in 1941. The Rocklea Munitions Works was opened as part of Australia's economic response to the Second World War whereby munitions production was expanded and decentralised around the country. When announced in early 1941, the Rocklea Munitions Works was expected to cost £1.5 million and employ 1,500 men and women. While the Rocklea Munitions Works was originally established to produce small-arms munitions, by 1944 the complex had been turned over to the maintenance and overhaul of aircraft engines. At its peak, the Rocklea Munitions Works employed around 3,000 people.

The significance of the link between the Rocklea Munitions Work and the Sub-Centre on Colebrook Avenue was recognised early on in 1941. On 26 March 1941, A.E. Beech, the Secretary to the Brisbane Parent Centre of the QATB, wrote to J.C. Slaughter, Brisbane City Council's Town Clerk. In this letter, Beech noted that the QATB aimed to have the Sub-Centre in Moorooka completed 'before the Munitions Factory open[ed] for production.' Furthermore, an article in the *Truth* recorded on 17 September 1941 that, '[r]apid industrialisation of the [Rocklea] district during recent years, which have been stepped up by the war, ha[d] made the [Sub-Centre] necessary.'

## **The establishment of the QATB Sub-Centre in Moorooka**

The Sub-Centre in Moorooka was built on land that goes back to a land purchase on 13 May 1862 by George Mackay who purchased portion 156B for £40. The plot that became 17 Colebrook Avenue – resubdivision 30 of subdivision 1 of portion 156B – was transferred to Charles Gladstone Davies in 1926. The land measured 24 perches and was subsequently transferred to Davies' wife, Margaret on the former's death in 1941. The land was then transferred to the Crown in 1942 at which point it was gazetted as a reserve.

This site, however, had not been the original location of choice. On 26 March 1941, when Beech wrote to Slaughter, the former requested permission to erect a sub-centre on a plot of land that was part of Stimpson Park in Moorooka. The land area requested was to be at the junction of Ipswich and Beaudesert Roads while facing Colebrook Avenue. The original proposed site had been selected for its strategic location. It was located on a major transport artery – Ipswich Road – that gave easy access to the surrounding area. This included the industrial area in Rocklea. Eventually, the request was referred to Brisbane City Council's Establishment and Co-ordination Committee. This was because the QATB had requested the use of parkland for what was defined as non-public purposes. Importantly, this referral and two other cases, led to a significant policy decision by Brisbane City Council. It was decided that any future application to lease 'park lands for purposes other than those for which the land is held by the Council be declined.'

This refusal was not the end of Brisbane City Council's involvement in developing the Sub-Centre on Colebrook Avenue. In communicating the outcome to QATB's original request, Slaughter reminded Beech of their 'telephone

conversation' in which he suggested that:

[y]our Committee [...] interview [Council's] Property and Insurance Officer [...] with a view to your Committee acquiring other Council property.

Notably, a report appeared in *The Telegraph* on 16 April 1941 recording that QATB had decided to 'purchase a piece of land on the corner of Mackay Street and Colebrook Avenue.' Significantly, this site's selection allowed the QATB to maintain easy strategic access to Ipswich Road, which had been a critical motivation in requesting the original location on Stimpson Park. Brisbane City Council's Registration Board approved the Sub-Centre in Moorooka on 19 May 1941.

The Sub-Centre in Moorooka was opened in early October 1941 by the Queensland Government's Minister for Health and Home Affairs, E.M. Hanlon, who reiterated its importance to the local area. The building was designed by noted Brisbane architects T.R. Hall and L.B. Phillips. Thomas Ramsey Hall and Lionel Blythwood Phillips entered a partnership in 1929 that lasted until the firm became known as Hall, Phillips and Wilson in 1948. It continues to this day as Smith Conwell Phillips. Hall came from a noted architectural family. His father was John Hall and his stepbrother was Francis Richard Hall. Hall had a varied career including a period as Town Clerk in Sandgate in 1907. In 1919, Hall went into partnership with George Gray Prentice. It was during this period that Phillips joined Hall and Prentice to work on Brisbane City Hall. In 1937, the executive committee of the QATB invited Hall and Phillips to be their Honorary Architects. By 1939, Hall and Phillips had accepted this appointment. Examples of Hall and Phillips' pre-Second World War designs for various emergency service buildings included the QATB Sub-Centre at Caboolture and the Fire Brigade Station at Southport. Both buildings opened in 1939.

Compared to other QATB buildings built before and after the Second World War, the Sub-Centre in Moorooka was much more simplified in style and detailing. However, in terms of the building's layout, the Sub-Centre in Moorooka was still representative of QATB buildings. The Sub-Centre consisted of the ambulance service facilities on the ground floor and a dwelling located on the second floor. Additionally, the former Sub-Centre in Moorooka is the only known example of an ambulance sub-centre built in Brisbane during the Second World War. The building was constructed of wood and tiles and built by George Mitchell, a builder from New Farm. The cost of the building was £1,240, 10 shillings and 8 pence.

The differing construction and design of the Sub-Centre in Moorooka related to its construction date of 1941. Early in the Second World War, the Australian Government-imposed limitations on the construction industry, and the availability of building materials and labour became increasingly scarce and expensive. As *The Architecture and Building Journal of Queensland* reflected in June 1941:

[d]efence works were making a heavy drain on available supplies [and] [i]n many instances there was considerable hesitancy even to undertake repairs or additions to city buildings and business premises.

By 1943, the QATB itself had hoped to establish further sub-centres under the control of the Brisbane Parent Centre but could not do so until 'conditions [were] again normal.'

Several additions were made to the Sub-Centre in Moorooka during its life as an ambulance station. This included the erection of a car shelter in the early 1950s. These additions related to the buildings function as an ambulance sub-centre. For example, the erection of the car shelter linked to the growing number of ambulance cars assigned to the Sub-Centre. When it opened in 1941, three ambulance cars were assigned to the Moorooka. In 1970, the Sub-Centre on Colebrook Avenue operated six cars.



## The use and development of the Moorooka Sub-Centre

When the Sub-Centre in Moorooka opened in 1941, the Brisbane Parent Centre of the QATB already had two sub-centres in Sandgate and Caboolture. Significantly, however, the Moorooka Sub-Centre was the first to be 'established in the Brisbane City area.' Parent Centres existed as self-governing organisations that controlled any number of localised sub-centres. Notably, the Sub-Centre in Sandgate, established in the 1920s, existed not only to served Sandgate but also the Redcliffe peninsula outside Brisbane's city limits. Similarly, the Sub-Centre in Caboolture, established in the 1930s, existed outside Brisbane's city limits.

Critically, the building of the Sub-Centre in Moorooka marked an essential step in the growth and decentralisation of the ambulance service in Brisbane. Indeed, Hanlon noted in September 1941 that the opening of further sub-centres would be 'guided by circumstances.' Similarly, from 1943 onwards the annual reports of the Brisbane Parent Centre of the QATB regularly referred to the aspiration of opening further sub-centres. These aspirations formed part of a QATB policy to extend decentralisation. However, at the time, this aspiration was limited by issues surrounding construction materials' availability, though after the Second World War decentralisation occurred. By 1970, there were 11 sub-centres within the Brisbane area and the parent centre in the central business district.

The Sub-Centre in Moorooka played an essential role in providing a much-needed ambulance service to the area and proved a focal point for the local community for a significant period. The growth in the number of ambulance cars assigned to Moorooka is indicative of the Sub-Centre's vital role in providing much-needed support to the area. In its first full year of operation between 1 July 1942 and 30 June 1943, the Sub-Centre dealt with 6,949 cases and covered 55,039 miles. In 1970, the Sub-Centre dealt with 15,470 cases and covered 86,543 miles despite the growth in Brisbane's number of sub-centres. The Sub-Centre continued to serve the local community in Moorooka until it was closed in the 1990s. Following the 1990 Queensland Parliamentary Sub-Committee enquiry into the state of ambulances service in the State, the various QATB centres were merged to form the Queensland Ambulance Service. After the Sub-Centre's closure in Moorooka, a new Deed of Grant for the land was drawn up with a new Real Property Description of Lot 1239, SL829. Since 1995, the former Sub-Centre in Moorooka has been operated an automotive repair centre.

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## Description

The former QATB Sub-Centre at 17 Colebrook Avenue is a two-storey structures in the Asymmetrical Hybrid style popular in Brisbane during the 1930s. Sited on the corner of Colebrook Avenue and Mackie Street, the building neighbours two interwar style commercial premises and overlooks Stimpson Park and the heritage-listed Moorooka Electricity Sub Station No. 213.

### General description

The former Sub-Centre's original form is significantly intact, including its stepped hip roof, a single street-facing gable atop two carports, and a sleeping verandah with steps flanking the gable's northern elevation. Original elements of the Asymmetrical Hybrid style also remain, despite periodic alterations having occurred.

Remaining elements include casement and awning windows, a corner casement bay that wraps the sleeping verandah, and a large bay of awning windows on the street-facing gable. Some cantilevered, galvanised metal window hoods also survive, particularly over windows on the ground floor of both east and west elevations.

A single door remains on the first level of the western elevation, as evidence of the switch-back stairs that flanked the building but were removed c.2009. Although not likely original, the stairs were timber construction, included a

3-rail timber balustrade, and were extant during the 1970s. These stairs provided external access to the first level from Colebrook Avenue, with the first tread adjacent the far-right carport.

Various original design details are also observed. Roof eaves are narrow and lined with painted timber battening. Most of the exterior fibre-cement sheet wall cladding survives, complete with expressed cover strips that accentuate the sheeting joints.

As a prominent detail, decorative half-timbered gable infill adorns the north, east and west elevation of the street-facing gable. The half-timbered infill is found only on the street-facing gable, which visually separates the projecting gable from the core of the building and expresses basic stylistic ornamentation.

The windows follow a hierarchy, where visually prominent windows on the street-facing gable are afforded wider proportions than those located on the building's core. However, a 3-pane vertical arrangement, undecorated frames and shallow sills are universal, visually unifying the windows.

Original bracket and bargeboard profiles are also observed above the entrances to the garage beneath the street-facing gable. These profiles are either side of the central post, with each portal sporting its own bargeboard and set of brackets.

The original concrete 'ribbon' or 'Hollywood' strip driveways off Colebrook Avenue remain. The original driveways are easily discernible from the surrounding non-original concreting and extend from the property boundary to the original garage beneath the street-facing gable.

Non-original alterations include:

- The original corrugated sheet metal roofing has been replaced with a narrower orb than original installed (c.2013)
- An exposed carport and concreting along the Colebrook Avenue boundary; and
- Additions to rear of property beyond core of house, complete with sheet metal skillion roofs to the southern elevation.

The street-facing gable enjoys particularly wide and unimpeded views out over Stimpson Park and the Moorooka Electricity Sub Station No. 213.

## Significant features

Features of cultural heritage significance include:

- Original Asymmetrical Hybrid Form of building, including:
  - Stepped hip roof.
  - Single street-facing gable.
  - Sleeping verandah and steps.
- Casement and awning window locations and arrangements
- Window hoods.
- Design details:
  - Narrow roof eaves, lined with timber battening
  - Expressed cover strips over wall cladding
  - Decorative half-timbering
  - Bracket and bargeboard profiles above vehicle entrance
  - Two concrete Ribbon or Hollywood driveways, from Colebrook Avenue to original carports.
- All original fixtures and fittings.
- Views from street-facing gable, including:
  - Out across Stimpson Park.
  - Out over Moorooka Electricity Sub Station No. 213.

## Non-significant features

Non-significant features include:

- Non-original (c.2013) narrow orb sheet metal roofing (stepped hip roof form remains significant).
  - Additions to rear of property, including sheet metal skillion roofs.
  - Exposed carport on Colebrook Avenue boundary, including any fixings to buildings.
  - Concreted area on Colebrook Avenue boundary expect for the original Ribbon/Hollywood driveways described in significant features.
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## 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:

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### Historical

#### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

Purpose-built in 1941 to meet the local area's needs, the former Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade Sub-Centre in Moorooka contributes to our understanding of the growth and development of Brisbane's ambulance and emergency services infrastructure in the mid-20th Century. As the first decentralised ambulance sub-centre designed to serve Brisbane's suburbs, the building also demonstrates the relationship between the emergency services and Australia's industrial efforts during the Second World War.

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### Rarity

#### CRITERION B

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

Purpose-built in 1941, the former Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade Sub-Centre is the oldest surviving ambulance sub-centre in Brisbane and the only known station built during the Second World War.

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## Representative

### CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

As a Second World War ambulance and emergency services building, the two-storey building consists of ambulance service facilities and office on the ground level and living quarters on the upper level. The building also has a sizeable front exit that provided easy access to Colebrook Avenue for resident ambulances. Due to the construction methods utilised, the building is also representative of the challenges that confronted the building industry during the Second World War.

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## 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

The former Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade Sub-Centre in Moorooka has a special association with the work of noted architects T.R. Hall and L.B. Phillips who, by 1939, were the Honorary Architects to the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade.

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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.

prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2025)



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