

## Heritage



### Tram Pole

### Key details

Addresses	Outside 29 Merthyr Road, New Farm, Queensland 4005
Type of place	Tram pole
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Key dates	Date of Citation — June 2025
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific; (H) Historical association

Erected by 1898 as part of the electrification and extension of Brisbane's tramway network by the Brisbane Tramways Company Limited, the cast metal tram pole located outside of 29 Merthyr Road, New Farm is an important and rare remnant of Brisbane's tramway network that was decommissioned in 1969. The expansion and electrification of Brisbane's tramway network occurred when the City's population was expanding, and there was a growing need for greater access to public transport.

## History

## A history of New Farm

New Farm, an inner suburb located approximately two kilometres from central Brisbane, is one of the City's oldest suburbs. New Farm traces its history back to Brisbane's convict era when the peninsula became the location for a convict farm.

An early settler on the peninsula was Richard Jones, who, in 1850, was elected a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council as representative for the counties of Gloucester, Macquarie and Stanley. Brisbane was in the county of Stanley. In 1851, Jones became the member for Stanley Burroughs after his previous electorate was split into three. Jones' original electorate became the districts of Gloucester and Macquarie, Stanley, and Stanley Boroughs. Jones purchased 93 acres of land by the Brisbane River, on which he built a house in 1847. This land included the former convict farm that had become known as 'New Farm,' after which the suburb is named. Sir Samuel Griffith, Premier of Queensland (1890-1893) and the first Chief Justice of Australia (1903-1919), subsequently purchased 'New Farm' and built a home there known as *Merthyr*. *Merthyr* was named after Griffith's birthplace of Merthyr Tydfil in Wales. The former suburb of Merthyr on the southern end of the New Farm peninsula was named after Griffith's home. Merthyr now forms part of New Farm.

By the 1880s, with the passage of the *Divisional Boards Act 1879*, the southern and eastern portion of the New Farm peninsula formed part of Booroodabin Divisional Board while the rest of the peninsula formed part of Brisbane Municipal Council. In 1903, after the passage of the *City of Brisbane Enlargement Act* in 1902, the New Farm peninsula entirely became part of Brisbane Municipal Council after the abolition of the Booroodabin Divisional Board. In 1903, the New Farm peninsula was split into two wards, Merthyr and Cintra.

Industrial development on the New Farm peninsula began in the 1890s with the opening of the Colonial Sugar Refinery on the peninsula's eastern side in 1893. In addition, a railway goods line was developed to service this part of New Farm. At the same time, an increase in the numbers of workers led to a growth in housing numbers. Shopping areas developed along the tram line that opened on Brunswick Street in the 1880s. By 1900, New Farm was being described as a 'fashionable suburb' in the local newspapers. By 1911, the local population was 5,394. Later developments included the opening of picture theatres in 1914 and 1921, and the establishment of New Farm Park in 1914. Between the First and Second World Wars, New Farm became known for the expansion in the building of flats as a form of affordable accommodation, a pattern of urban development that has continued through to the 21st Century. By 2021, New Farm's population, stood at 12,197.

## The development of Brisbane's tramway network

During the 1870s, a discussion emerged in Brisbane about the need for a tramway network. At the end of 1879, two proposals were considered by Brisbane Municipal Council for the building of a tramway in Brisbane. While these proposals and other similar ideas were not progressed, in 1882, the Queensland Government passed *The Tramways Act* to 'Authorise the Construction, Maintenance, and Working of Tramways on Public Streets and Roads in such manner as not to impede Ordinary Traffic.' This decision to build a tramway network helped provide effective public transport for the City's population. In the long term, the development of the system also influenced the settlement patterns in Brisbane.

The passage of *The Tramways Act* led to the creation in 1883 of the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company, a successor to the failed Metropolitan Land and Investment Company created in 1882. Construction of the tramway network began in early 1885, and Brisbane's first horse-drawn tramcar operated on 10 August of the same year. The mainline operated from the Woolloongabba Hotel over the Victoria Bridge to the intersection of Wickham Street with Brunswick Street. In addition, branch lines were built out to the Exhibition grounds, Breakfast Creek, to Ann Street, and down the New Farm peninsula.

The *Tramways Act of 1882 Amendment Act of 1890* updated the legislation to allow a company to sell its tramway infrastructure to another organisation. The amended act included other provisions, such as the provision of 'electric force transmitted by wires' and the '[p]ower to construct, maintain, and renew works and appliances necessitated by use of motive power other than horse.' With the passing of the amended act, in 1895, the newly registered Brisbane Tramways Company Limited, purchased the infrastructure owned by the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company with the intention to 'install electrically-propelled trams and extend the system.' The Brisbane Tramways Company was responsible for the construction, maintenance, management and operation of tramways, motor and horse omnibus services in Brisbane.

Electrification of the tramway network started in 1895, and a contract was signed with the Tramways Construction Company Limited of London to electrify the system. Until 1900, the Tramways Construction Company undertook 'track construction, building of power houses, carsheds, etc.' on behalf of the Brisbane Tramway Company. From 1900 until 1922, this work was undertaken by the Brisbane Electric Tramways Investment Company Limited. Both companies were associated with the Brisbane Tramways Company.

The materials necessary to electrify the tramway network were supplied by the General Electric Company from the United States on behalf of the Tramway Construction Company. General Electric sent Joseph Stillman Badger to oversee the work. After General Electric completed the work, Badger stayed in Brisbane as the Chief Electrical Engineer of the Brisbane Tramways Company. He eventually became General Manager and then the Managing Director of the Brisbane Tramways. He retired in 1922 though his influence on the development of Brisbane's tramway network was felt until its decommissioning in 1969.

On 21 June 1897, Brisbane Tramways Company introduced the first electric trams to Brisbane. The first electric tramcar ran from Logan Road to the southern end of Victoria Bridge. Between 1897 and 1922, Brisbane's tramway network experienced rapid expansion in response to the City's population growth. From a population of 101,554 in 1891, Brisbane had expanded to a population of 139,480 in 1911, then to 209,168 by 1921. The number of tramcars in operation increased from 20 in 1897 to 181 in 1922. The length of the line grew from 15 miles in 1897 to 42.5 miles in 1922.

As part of the electrification process, a power station to supply current to electric trams was constructed in Countess Street, Brisbane. The first part of this was completed in 1896. Other power stations were built on Logan Road, Woolloongabba and Light Street, Fortitude Valley. As the tramway network expanded, a series of substations were constructed from the late 1920s onwards at strategic locations in Brisbane to supply electricity more economically to the system. Electricity from these substations was distributed by the City Electric Light Company Limited, which, in 1921, had purchased the Brisbane Tramways Company's distribution assets. In 1928, Brisbane City Council opened the Powerhouse in New Farm, which was built to supply electricity to the tramway network via the substations around Brisbane and provide energy to the expanding suburbs.

After the First World War, there was support for the idea that the tramway network be owned and operated by a public authority rather than a private company. In 1922, the Brisbane Tramway Trust was inaugurated by an Act of Parliament. The Brisbane Tramway Trust assumed ownership and control of the tramway network in January 1923. The tramway network had failed to keep pace with the expansion of Brisbane, so the Brisbane Tramway Trust faced a considerable backlog of work. The Brisbane Tramway Trust undertook the construction of repair workshops and car depots, laying of additional tracks, purchasing additional cars, and introducing remote control of points at busy intersections. Further expansion occurred after 1925 when tramway operations transferred to the newly created Greater Brisbane City Council.

The expansion of housing in Brisbane after the Second World War encouraged Brisbane City Council to extend the tramway network. At this time, weekday peak service in the morning saw 246 tram cars operating, while in the evening, 296 cars were required to provide the service during peak traffic. During the day, each route was serviced by a tram every ten minutes. However, from the 1950s, various factors led to a decline in the use of the

tramway network. Increased suburbanisation saw more and more families move to areas not directly connected to the tram network. This contributed to the growth in the use of the motor car, which reduced passenger numbers. Similarly, the growth of the Brisbane City Council's bus fleet gradually outstripped that of the tramway network. Buses had the advantage of not requiring expensive infrastructure, and they also reached areas of Brisbane not serviced by the tramway network. Finally, a lack of investment in the technological development of trams compared with increasing expenditure on diesel buses contributed to the conversion of Brisbane's public transport network from trams to buses. This lack of investment was driven by the view that cars and buses were the future of transportation in Brisbane. This decline was exacerbated when, in 1962, the Paddington tram depot burned down with the loss of 65 trams. This resulted in the loss of around 20 per cent of Brisbane's tram fleet at the time.

In 1964, the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council sponsored a wide-ranging study into Brisbane's future transport and traffic needs, considering the City's projected population growth through to the 1980s. *The Brisbane Transportation Study*, published in 1965 and produced by the American firm Wilbur Smith and Associates, formed part of the inter-governmental discussions between Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government over transport developments, and deliberations surrounding the preparation of Brisbane's first Town Plan in the early- to mid-1960s. *The Brisbane Transportation Study* recommended the '[r]eplacement of all trams and trolley buses' and their replacement with additional buses. In 1968, due to the changes that occurred in the 1950s and recommendations in the 1960s, Brisbane City Council voted to decommission the tramway network. After 84 years of operations, Brisbane's tramway network ceased to operate in 1969.

## **The tram pole and the development of the tramway network in New Farm**

Even before the operation of the first horse-drawn tramcar in 1885, New Farm had been considered a crucial part of any proposed tramway network in the City. When the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company began operating its service in 1885, a branch line operated in New Farm down Brunswick Street initially to Harcourt Street and then by the end of the year to Browne Street. When the Brisbane Tramways Company took over running the tramways in 1895, the line in New Farm was amongst the first to be electrified.

When the Brisbane Tramways Company began electrifying the tramway network, they also extended the line in New Farm. In 1897, *The Telegraph* reported that plans were being made to extend the tram line down Barker Street, Moray Street, and partway down Merthyr Road, where the former tram pole is located, even though there was local opposition to the plan. An Order-in-Council for the construction of the extension was issued in March 1898, and the extension was completed that year. The extension ran to point in line with Ella Street, now Hazel Street, off Merthyr Road and the work was undertaken by the Tramways Construction Company. As part of the New Farm tram line, installing the infrastructure required to support the tramway network was necessary. A crucial element of this infrastructure was the tram poles required to transfer electricity to a tram's traction motor from live overhead wires. However, unlike most suburbs in Brisbane, the tram poles installed during the extension of the New Farm line in 1898 were metal rather than timber.

While the specific details outlining the construction of the New Farm extension no longer exist, those specifications extant for other lines built during the same period illustrate that a standardised system of layout and erection of the tram poles existed. Given the similarity between the detailed descriptions extant in these specifications and the height of the tram pole outside of 29 Merthyr Road, the layout of the New Farm extension followed a similar pattern. For example, in 1896, the specification for the erection of tram poles used in the extension of the tramway network to Lthaca recorded that:

[t]he wire for the electric power supply will be carried on light steel tubular poles fixed at each side of the road at a distance of not more than 135 feet apart. The height of the wire above the roadway



will be 18 feet 6 inches.

Similarly, a 1900 specification for the proposed extension of the tramway network along Leichhardt Street and Wharf Street reflected the requirements outlined in 1896. However, the 1900 specification provided further details, noting that the tram pole would be located on 'curb lines' and 'opposite each other.' Moreover, it was noted that:

From these [tram] poles span wires will be stretched across the roadway which carry the electric current and which are of [...] hard copper wire. These wires will not be less than 18' 6" above the roadway. Feeder wires will also be carried upon the poles supported by cross arms as shown on plan.

While many of the tram poles installed during the extension and electrification of Brisbane tramway network were of metal construction, the decision to install metal tram poles on Barker Street, Moray Street and Merthyr Road stemmed from opposition by Brisbane Municipal Council to the proposal to use wooden poles. Brisbane Municipal Council was concerned that if the infrastructure was not installed correctly, the brick drain that ran 'up the centre of Merthyr Road' could be damaged. Accordingly, Brisbane Municipal Council petitioned 'that iron poles be erected in proper cement beds.' This view was supported by the Booroodabin Divisional Board in whose jurisdiction Merthyr Road lay. While the tram poles would be constructed of metal, their installation did cause some debate amongst the various parties involved. For example, the Secretary to the Queensland Railway Commissioner noted in April 1898 that it was not Brisbane Municipal Council's 'place to make suggestions as to what is required to strengthen the drain.'

The tramway network in New Farm was further developed with an extension from Ella Street down Merthyr Road being constructed in 1900. Other extensions in New Farm occurred in 1914 and 1926. The tram pole continued to be used as part of Brisbane tramway infrastructure until 1969, when trams ceased operation.

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## Description

The Tram Pole is located close to the kerb on the footpath outside 29 Merthyr Road, New Farm. From the New Farm Riverwalk in the southwest of the New Farm Peninsula to Macquarie Street in the northeast, Merthyr Road forms a major thoroughfare in the southern portion of the suburb of New Farm.

### General description

The pole is proximate to a more recent low-height garden with a large tree. Constructed of cast metal, the tram pole is cylindrical in shape with a base diameter of approximately 200 millimetres and an overall height of approximately six metres. The base of the pole is set into a concrete footing beneath the asphalt pathway. The pole is divided into three vertical segments, each decreasing in diameter by approximately 50 millimetres. The base segment is 3.5 metres tall, the middle 1.5 metres tall, and the top 1 metre tall. A wooden cross arm is fixed to the top of the pole and includes the possible remnants of the original power lines (wires).

While the surface of the pole is generally exposed, there are remnants of peeling and degraded paint indicating that the pole was previously painted in light-coloured paint. Whilst a large tree on the footpath to the north-east impacts on views to the top-most segment, views to the body of the pole are unobstructed from the street and footpath.

## Significant features

Features of cultural heritage significance include:

- Location on Merthyr Road, close to the kerb
- Unobstructed views to the pole from the street and footpath
- Cast metal tram pole
- Wooden cross arm
- Remnants of power lines (wire)
- Concrete footing
- Remnants of previously applied paint(s)

## Non-significant features

Non-significant features include:

- Asphalt surface at the base of the pole
- Low-height garden at the base of pole and adjacent tree

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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

Erected by 1898 as part of the electrification of Brisbane's tramway network and the extension of the system further into New Farm, the tram pole is important in providing evidence of the development of Brisbane's former public tram system. Brisbane's tramway network was a crucial mode of public transport between 1885 and 1969 that contributed to the City's development and settlement pattern.

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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

The intact tram pole located outside 29 Merthyr Road is a rare surviving example of the infrastructure associated with the extension and electrification of Brisbane's tramway network in the late-19th Century. Much of the infrastructure associated with Brisbane's tramway network has been removed since operations ended in 1969.

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## Scientific

### CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

The cast metal tram pole on Merthyr Road has the potential to yield technical information that contributes to an understanding of the development of Brisbane's tramway network, associated infrastructure, and the network's electrification and extension in the late-19th Century by the Brisbane Tramways Company. As expressed in the citation's history, the tram pole also has the potential to contribute information about the material and the pre-fabrication and modular manufacturing methods used to produce late-19th Century tram poles.

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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 intact tram pole has a special association with the Tramways Construction Company, established in 1895. Until 1900, on behalf of the Brisbane Tramway Company, the Tramways Construction Company undertook the installation and building of the infrastructure associated with the extension and electrification of Brisbane's tramway network, including the tram pole outside 29 Merthyr Road.

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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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