

Heritage Citation



Albany Creek Memorial Park

Key details

Addresses	At 400 Albany Creek Road, Bridgeman Downs, Queensland 4035
Type of place	Monument / memorial
Period	Late 20th Century 1960-1999
Lot plan	L2_RP868572
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 September 2023 Date of Citation — July 2023
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

The mid-Century Modernist crematorium and chapel at the Albany Creek Memorial Park contribute to our understanding of the changing character of Brisbane's interment practices in the mid-twentieth century. At the time of opening in 1964 approximately, one in two interments in Brisbane were cremations. Albany Creek Memorial Park is highly intact and aesthetically significant. It is also a rare example of a purpose-built privately constructed and operated crematorium and chapel. Designed by noted Brisbane architect Blair Wilson, the site consists of the representative elements of a crematorium, including the original chapel, concealed committal

chamber, concealed mortuary, concealed furnace, and chimney.

History

A history of Bridgeman Downs

Gazetted as a suburb in 1975, the area now known as Bridgeman Downs once formed part of the Aspley and Bald Hills areas. Bridgeman Downs is named after Henry St John Bridgeman who, in 1863, purchased portions 95a, 96a, and 97a in the parish of Nundah. This land totalled around 370 acres. In 1877, Bishop James Quinn's Queensland Immigration Society purchased Bridgeman's land. The land became known as the Bishop's Paddock and was leased mostly to German immigrants, who cleared and fenced the land in lieu of making lease payments. Other early settlers from Great Britain and China also came to the area. Until the latter part of the twentieth century, Bridgeman Downs' area was predominantly rural and linked to the agriculture industry. Several noted local families were involved in the agriculture industry, such as the Beckett family, who lived on Beckett Road until 1914. The family was initially involved in mixed farming, but from 1912 onwards they raised pigs. These pigs were sold to J.C. Hutton's on Zillmere Road.

After being gazetted as a suburb, the residential development of Bridgeman Downs began in earnest in the 1990s with population increasing from 1,258 in 1991, to 7,445 in 2011. During this period much of the farmland that once characterised the area was sold for residential development changing the character of the area. At the time of writing, Bridgeman Downs is characterised by a large number of detached homes on acreage and some housing estates where townhouses, small lot homes and units have been constructed.

The changing pattern of internment practises in Australia

Cremation has come to symbolise 'the modern way of death in Australia.' By 1988-89, 50 per cent of deceased people in Queensland were cremated. This increase represents a significant shift in the character of internment practices not only in Queensland but Australia more broadly. Critical reasons as to why cremation has increasingly become a preferred internment method in Australia include its perceived 'sanitary advantages,' being an efficient form of disposal, overcrowding problems in traditional cemeteries, and the increasing secularisation of Australian society in the twentieth century. Many of these reasons were also present in other countries, such as Great Britain.

In 1873, in reply to a letter about cemeteries, the editor of The Telegraph argued that:

In cremation is the only proper method of treating the corpses of the dead, in our opinion, but society has to be educated up to the point of resuscitating that ancient practice.

It was in the pages of local newspapers where the debate over cremation primarily resided until the early years of the twentieth century. At this time, two noteworthy events occurred that helped change the discussion over cremation in Queensland. First, the Queensland Government passed the Cremation Act in 1913 on 14 November 1913, which set the statutory framework for establishing crematoriums in Queensland. Second, the Brisbane Cremation Association was established in 1915. The Brisbane Cremation Association campaigned for cremation as a preferred form of internment in Brisbane. This campaign to educate the public about the advantages of cremation took various forms, including lectures and most notably letters to the press. For example, in a 1917 opinion piece in The Daily Mail, E.V. Stevens, the Honorary Secretary to the Brisbane Cremation Association, outlined the perceived advantages of cremation, including sanitary, economic, and sentimental factors. However,

opposition to cremation existed within Brisbane, especially from the Catholic community. For example, the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig made the case against cremation in the 1950s just as discussion emerged about opening a second crematorium in Brisbane.

In the 1920s, the Brisbane Cremation Association's activities declined despite its mission to educate the public. However, new impetus for building a crematorium emerged at the same time. After the establishment of Brisbane City Council in 1925, support existed to 'devote a small area of land' to establish a crematorium and chapel in Brisbane by the Cremation Society of Australia. Eventually, Brisbane Crematorium Limited was established in 1930 to provide 'sufficient capital to erect and equip a modern Crematorium' in Brisbane. In the same year, the Brisbane Cremation Association was re-established and was closely linked to Brisbane Crematorium Limited. For example, M.S. Herring, the Secretary to the Brisbane Cremation Association, was also one of Brisbane Crematorium Limited's provisional directors when it was established in 1930. Eventually, developments in the early 1930s led to Brisbane Crematorium Limited opening a crematorium at Mount Thompson in 1934. It was Brisbane Crematorium Limited who would later open the crematorium at 400 Albany Creek Road in 1964.

The development of the Albany Creek Memorial Park

The 1950s saw an increase in the number of people choosing cremation as their preferred form of internment. In 1953 it was reported that Queensland 'had the highest proportion of cremations in the Western world.' Twenty-five per cent of people who died in Queensland were cremated. In Brisbane, that proportion increased to 45 per cent. This growth meant that Brisbane was confronted with the need to build a second crematorium. Therefore, in the 1950s, Brisbane City Council discussed establishing a crematorium to supplement the privately owned facility at Mount Thompson. This discussion was linked to a proposed new cemetery in the area of Aspley-Chermside due to overcrowding in other Brisbane City Council-owned cemeteries. However, Brisbane City Council eventually decided not to pursue building a crematorium but still developed a cemetery in the Aspley area. Pinnaroo Lawn Cemetery opened in 1962 and is located north of the Albany Creek Memorial Park. This site was chosen in preference to the land now occupied by the Albany Creek Memorial Park because 'grave digging and maintenance costs in the case of portions 29 and 30 [were] much higher than in the instance of portion 95A.'

Despite eventually deciding to proceed with Pinnaroo Lawn Cemetery's opening, Brisbane City Council purchased the land at 400 Albany Creek Road subject site – resubdivision 2 of subdivision 2 of portion 30 – in late 1959. This land dated back to a Deed of Grant granted to Alice Proud in the 1860s. In 1939, a new Deed of Grant was granted to William Shaw for subdivision 2 of portion 30 and was subdivided further in 1959. At the same time as Brisbane City Council purchased the land at 400 Albany Creek Road, Brisbane Crematorium Limited looked at how they could expand their own Brisbane facilities. In August 1959, Brisbane Crematorium Limited requested Brisbane City Council sell them 30 acres of resubdivision 2 of subdivision 2 of portion 30. Brisbane City Council agreed to this request and decided to sell the land off for £175 per acre. However, in October 1959, Brisbane Crematorium Limited requested that Brisbane City Council sell them 40 acres of land rather than 30. While this was agreed on, the land cost rose from £175 to £200 per acre. In due course, 40 acres of land – subdivision 2 of resubdivision 2 of subdivision 2 of portion 30 – was transferred to Brisbane Crematorium Limited by July 1961.

Brisbane Crematorium Limited hired R. Martin Wilson and Son to design the Albany Creek Memorial Park crematorium and chapel. Established in 1884 by A.B. Wilson, by the 1960s, R. Martin Wilson and Son consisted of Ronald Martin Wilson and his son, Blair. Ronald Wilson initially joined his father's practise in 1903 but spent the period from 1911 to 1920 away from the firm. Ronald Wilson re-joined his father's practice in 1920 as a partner. In 1928, Ronald Wilson continued the practice as R. Martin Wilson, Architect and Architectural Engineer after his father retired. At the age of 70, Ronald Wilson was joined in practice by his son, Blair in 1956. Blair Wilson took the lead in designing the crematorium and chapel at 400 Albany Creek Road.

Blair Wilson graduated from the newly established six-year architecture degree at the University of Queensland in 1955. At graduation, Blair Wilson won Queensland Institute of Architects' Memorial Medal for student architecture in 1954. After designing the crematorium and chapel at 400 Albany Creek Road, Blair Wilson designed several noted buildings, including the La Boite Theatre and the Kindler Memorial Theatre at the Queensland Institute of Technology. For the La Boite Theatre, Blair Wilson was awarded the Clay Brick Award. Similarly, the Kindler Memorial Theatre won Blair Wilson the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Queensland Chapter's Bronze Medal in 1973.

Brisbane City Council's Registration Board approved a building application from Blair Wilson to erect a crematorium at 400 Albany Creek Road in April 1963. It was a condition of the approval that the buildings erected 'be so designed and constructed as to present a pleasing appearance to the road frontage of the site.' Subsequently, a building application was received by Brisbane City Council in November 1962 for the construction of the crematorium. Constructed and opened by 1964, the modernist designed crematorium and chapel has been in continuous use since its opening. In 1966, the distinctive building was nominated for the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Queensland Chapter's Bronze Medal for the building of the year.

Albany Creek Memorial Park has continually expanded since its opening with the various additions providing evidence of changing attitudes towards internment practices in Brisbane since the site's establishment in the 1960s. Two non-significant residences were constructed in the 1960s while additional columbaria have been added as the numbers of people choosing cremation as their preferred internment method has increased; a second chapel was opened in the 1990s. Landscaping of the site is a prominent feature of the Albany Creek Memorial Park, and various trees and plants have been planted sympathetically to obscure the main complex and contribute to the site's story. As the plantings have matured, they purposefully obscure the main complex and provide privacy to mourners. In 1993, Brisbane Cremation Limited was taken over by the American firm, Service Corporation International. At this time, Service Corporation International had taken over several crematoria in Australia. As a result of this takeover, it was 'claimed that prices trebled at one Queensland crematorium.' Invocare, and Australian company, currently owns the site.

Description

Garden Chapel (former Northern Chapel) – External

The Garden Chapel is a predominantly brick structure, comprising a tall gable roof and a porte-cochere in a north-south orientation. The deep, flat, corrugated metal roof of the porte-cochere is supported by two stone-faced walls, and contrasts against the tiled, steep-pitch gable roof of the Garden Chapel. The two walls are separated by an opening looking over a pond, rock wall, and vegetation (non-original), providing both setting and visual relief from the carpark.

Owing to its height, the Garden Chapel is one of the more prominent structures of the site. The roof is tiled and comparatively steep with deep metal fascias and lined soffits. The northern end of the gable is almost entirely constructed of frameless glazing, allowing natural light to penetrate deep into the main hall. Exterior walls are exposed brick masonry that cleverly double as columbaria. The walls extend beyond the main hall entrance, creating a porch underneath the porte-cochere. Three floor-to-ceiling, aluminium-frame windows punctuate the east and west elevations' providing views to the Central and North Chapel Courts.

Garden Chapel (former Northern Chapel) – Internal

The Garden Chapel interior is a large and rectangular space, with ample natural light admitted via the glazed gable and floor-to-ceiling windows. The main entry to the interior of the space is from under the porte-cochere. At the southern end of the interior space, a single step leads up to a stage flanked by doors leading to a vestry (east) and the ancillary spaces of the committal chamber (west).

As a backdrop to the stage, two stone-faced walls are turned in at a slight angle to reveal and frame a timber catafalque (a raised platform that supports a casket or coffin). The stone covers the whole wall, following the steep roofline until it disappears behind a curved roof feature. A plasterboard-lined wall fills the gap between the walls, except for the opening that frames the catafalque. The space in which the catafalque is set has a floor plan akin to a truncated triangle. The stone-faced walls conceal doors that lead from this space to the mortuary.

Ceilings and walls are lined with plasterboard. Artificial lighting and mechanical services (air-conditioning) are hidden behind a large, curved roof feature that sits directly above the stage. Contemporary tiles and carpet are used as floor surface materials; however, the original plans note terrazzo floor tiling as having been laid.

The floor-to-ceiling windows on the east and west elevations allow views from the main hall to the Central Courtyard and North Chapel Court.

Committal Chamber, Mortuary, Furnace and General Office

The Garden Chapel comprises only part of a larger complex of conjoined spaces, including a committal chamber, mortuary, furnace room, other ancillary or storage spaces and a general office. Situated south of the main chapel, these are constructed of brick masonry, with flat roofs and deep fascia similar to the porte-cochere.

The committal chamber, mortuary, furnace room and ancillary spaces are concentrated in the south-western corner of the complex, hidden from public view by the Garden Chapel and general office. Externally, these spaces are indistinguishable from the general office, with the only indication of their function being the tall chimney constructed of the same brick masonry.

The rectangular brick chimney is a distinctive feature of the site. Running bond brickwork creates a base that extends beyond the flat, corrugated metal roof. An alternating pattern of a single, standard brick course and an expressed course of vertically orientated brick heads gives the chimney a ribbed appearance. The corners of each expressed course comprise two standard orientation bricks in a stacked bond configuration. At the termination of the alternating brickwork pattern, the bricks step back in line with the pattern's recessed courses. This line continues for several, running bond courses until a single course of offset bricks cap the perimeter of the chimney.

The general office is also of brick masonry construction and has been altered. In particular, the current entrance now encloses part of an undercover walkway that hugs the perimeter of the built complex. Non-original aluminium-framed doors and glazing have been used to enclose the walkway. The extent of the original general office is demarcated by the higher roofline behind the current entrance.

North Chapel Court and West Covered Way

The North Chapel Court is directly adjacent to the west elevation of the Garden Chapel. The North Chapel Court is enclosed to the east by a covered walkway, to the west by single columbarium, and south by the West Covered Way. Undercover brick columbaria conceal the structural columns that support the roof above the West Covered Way. The West Covered Way's flat roof and metal fascia are similar to the porte-cochere. Landscaping in the North Chapel Court is low-level and unobtrusive. Rectangular grassed areas separate two strips of memorial plaques.

Central Courtyard

The Central Courtyard is flanked to the west by the Garden Chapel and general office and to the south by the 'Lakeview Chapel' (a contemporary addition). A covered walkway with similar depth and fascia detail to the porte-cochere separates the Central Courtyard from the main complex. It follows their built form and orientation to create a half-hexagonal enclosure. The courtyard is then enclosed to the east by a circular covered walkway under which columbaria radiate from the general office. Another covered walkway dissects the courtyard and leads directly to the general office. Parts of the original walkway have been enclosed since original construction, including those parts that run parallel to the general office and newer 'Lakeview Chapel'. Tiling extends from the base of each columbarium to the outermost edge of the curved walkway. Landscaping in the central courtyard is low-lying and unobtrusive.

Structural columns that support the walkway's flat roof are integrated into the columbaria. Other structural columns align with the columbaria to create framed sightlines to and from the landscaped courtyard. The concealment and alignment of structural columns give the impression that the columbaria are integral to the walkway, whilst framing views to and from the Central Courtyard. The columbaria cross the edge of the walkway and extend in towards the Central Courtyard.

Surrounding landscape

Main entrance gates constructed of the same brick masonry and stone-facing as the main complex greet visitors. A line of palms then direct visitors to an intersection where grass lawn sprawls in-front of low hedging, tall trees, and elevated columbaria. Together these obscure the main complex, with only the Garden Chapel's gable visible.

Imitating the design of the Central Courtyard, a non-original gazebo to the north (beyond the northern carpark) is surrounded by original radiating columbaria. Purposeful planting of a mixture of large trees in line with, and between, the columbaria emphasise the radial layout and screen Albany Creek Road.

The elevated, stepped columbarium to the east of the Central Courtyard is also significant. Thoughtful planning mimics the walkways' layout that enclose the Central Courtyard, creating homogeneity between the main complex and landscape elements. Columbaria are arrayed and reflect the layout of the covered walkways that surround the Central Courtyard. Moreover, elevating the columbaria directly adjacent to the curved walkway provides unimpeded views over the Garden Chapel and wider complex. Views and vistas

Unimpeded views from inside the Garden Chapel out to the rock pool, North Chapel Court and Central Courtyard are significant. Additionally, wide views from the elevated columbaria directly adjacent the Central Courtyard allow appreciation of the complex.

Significant Elements

Features of cultural heritage significance include:

- Original built form and composition, including:
 - Garden Chapel with a steep-pitched, tiled gable roof, porte-cochere with flat, corrugated metal roof and rock pool
 - Committal Chamber, Mortuary, Furnace and General Office with rectangular forms and flat roofs of similar depth and detailing to Garden Chapel port-cochere
 - Location and concealment of Committal Chamber, Mortuary and Furnace behind Garden Chapel and General Office
 - Chimney of detailed brick masonry and its height relative to other structures in the complex
 - West Covered Way with flat-roof similar in depth and detailing to Garden Chapel port-cochere, and undercover columbaria

- North Chapel Court located west of Garden Chapel with rectangular form and columbaria used to enclose space
- Central Courtyard located east of Garden Chapel with flat-roofed walkways and radial columbaria used to enclose space
- Exterior Design details, including
 - Garden Chapel (port-cochere)
 - Port-cochere, with flat, corrugated metal roof and deep metal fasciae
 - Stone-faced walls
 - Pond and rock wall providing separation from northern carpark
 - Garden Chapel (main hall - exterior)
 - Steep-pitched, tiled gable roof of main Garden Chapel hall
 - Frameless glazing used on northern gable end
 - Exposed brick masonry walls, particularly those that double as a columbarium
 - Floor-to-ceiling windows with views to North Chapel Court and Central Courtyard
 - Garden Chapel (main hall - interior)
 - Stone-faced walls
 - Framed views of the catafalque
 - Committal Chamber, Mortuary, Furnace and General Office
 - Flat roofs and deep fascia similar in detail to port-cochere
 - Use of identical brick masonry
 - Concealment of Committal Chamber, Mortuary and Furnace behind General Office and Garden Chapel
 - Rectangular brick chimney with patterned brick detailing as described
 - West Covered Way
 - Flat roofs and deep fascia similar in detail to port-cochere
 - Columbaria
 - Concealment of structural columns supporting a flat roof
 - North Chapel Court
 - Columbarium used to enclose the court
 - Low-level planting
 - Central Courtyard
 - Flat roofs of walkway similar in detail to port-cochere
 - Radial columbarium
 - Concealment of structural columns supporting a flat roof
 - Exposed structural elements aligned with columbaria
 - Use of straight and curved walkways corresponding to the layout of the complex
 - Floor tiling related to columbaria as described
 - Landscaping
 - Main entry gate, including brick masonry and stone-faced walls
 - Avenue of palms upon entry
 - Radiating columbaria and corresponding planting north of northern carpark
 - Elevated and stepped columbaria to the east of Central Courtyard, and their layout mimicking Central Courtyard walkways
 - Views and Vistas
 - Views from inside Garden Chapel out to North Chapel Court and Central Courtyard
 - Views from elevated columbaria out over the complex
 - Views created by radiating columbaria into Central Courtyard
 - View from entrance gates to Garden Chapel roof

Non-Significant Elements

Non-significant features include:

- Contemporary additions, including
 - Additions to the south of General Office, including contemporary 'Lakeview Chapel'

- Aluminium-framed glazing and doors enclosing large parts of the covered walkway of Central Courtyard
 - Signage (e.g., entrance signage)
 - Landscape features, including
 - Columbaria and landscaping that do not comprise the original crematorium complex or its grounds
 - Directional signage
 - Road surface
 - Gazebos
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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:

Historical

CRITERION A

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

The crematorium and chapel at Albany Creek Memorial Park, and later expansion, contribute to our understanding of the changing character of Brisbane's interment practices in the 20th Century, as cremation has become more prevalent.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

Opened in 1964, Albany Creek Memorial Park is a rare example of a privately constructed and operated mid-Century Modernist crematorium and chapel in Brisbane.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

Albany Creek Memorial Park is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a mid-century Modernist crematorium. The site consists of an original, highly-intact chapel, chimney, concealed committal chamber, concealed mortuary, concealed furnace, columbaria, and a planned landscape setting.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

Consisting of extensive formal gardens, memorial structures, crematorium and chapel complex, the Albany Creek Memorial Park is important for its evocative attributes expressed through landscape, built form, composition, and detailing. The site design of the crematorium and chapel complex demonstrates an important relationship between built and open space with landscape elements and planting responding directly to the built form. As the site's primary structure, the steep gabled Garden Chapel is surrounded by single-storey, flat roofed buildings and structures including the porte-cochere, general office, committal chamber, mortuary, and furnace. Functional spaces are concealed behind the Garden Chapel and general office. Landscaped courtyards, flat-roofed covered walkways, columbaria, and a rock pool provide the setting for memorial and funeral services. Brick masonry construction and detailing is used to visually tie primary and secondary buildings, including the columbaria. The brick chimney is of aesthetic merit, owing to its level of masonry detail and height relative to the surrounding buildings. The stone-faced walls located throughout the site visually link the landscape to the built forms and interiors.

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

An early example of his work, the crematorium and chapel at Albany Creek Memorial Park have a special association with noted Brisbane architect Blair Wilson who worked with his father Ronald Martin Wilson as R. Martin Wilson and Son when the building was designed and built. Blair Wilson, who subsequently took over the practice in 1967 was noted for his contribution to Brisbane's built environment and the architectural profession.

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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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised November 2023)



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