

Heritage Citation



Australian Red Cross Centre

Key details

Also known as	Red Cross Centre
Addresses	At 55 Headfort Street, Greenslopes, Queensland 4120
Type of place	Welfare home
Period	World War II 1939-1945
Lot plan	L124_RP46047; L123_RP46047; L125_RP46047
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2003 Date of Citation — August 2001
Construction	Roof: Asbestos Cement; Walls: Timber

People/associations the Australian Red Cross Society (Association)

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (G) Social; (H) Historical association

This large timber hall and smaller neighbouring building were constructed circa 1945 as Red Cross recreation centres from funds raised by the Australian Red Cross Caf   in Brisbane. They demonstrate the commitment of the Brisbane community and the Australian Red Cross organisation to the Second World War effort and to providing facilities for Australian service personnel. The buildings have been in continuous use by the Red Cross for more than 65 years and have provided a base from which to provide important welfare services to the local community.

History

The Red Cross Society had its beginnings in Europe in 1859 when a Swiss businessman, Henry Dunant, witnessed first hand the suffering caused by war during a battle in Solferino, Northern Italy. His commitment to forming a society comprised of volunteers who would care for the wounded in wartime contributed to the first Red Cross conference in Geneva in 1863. This led to the diplomatic conference of 1864, also held in Geneva, which resulted in the Geneva Convention, the symbolism of the the red cross on a white background to symbolise aid and neutrality and the formation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1875. The new society was dedicated to providing care and protection for the wounded and recognising as neutral those who cared for them.

Soon after the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society was formed at Government House, Melbourne. Lady Munro-Ferguson, the wife of the Governor General, invited the wives of the state governors to form a committee in each state. The Queensland Division was created in 1914. At this time, the principal aims of the Australian Red Cross were to provide comforts for sick or wounded Australian military personnel, to fundraise for the activities of the Red Cross and to serve in military hospitals. The Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment movement started in New South Wales prior to the outbreak of World War I. This movement, based on the British model, provided assistance to the medical and nursing staff of the army in the form of male and female volunteers trained in basic nursing and first aid. Australian VADs, as they became known, served in both military and civilian hospitals in Australia and overseas in both World War I and World War II.

During World War II, important services carried out by the Red Cross included hospital visiting, welfare work, vocational training and home help. The valuable role of the VADS was officially recognised in 1942 with the establishment of the Australian Army Military Women's Service. This meant that VADs became paid members of the Australian Army rather than unpaid volunteers. The pioneering blood transfusion service was another important activity of the Red Cross during World War II. The provision of comforts and other aid for POWs, war brides, refugees and service personnel overseas, including nurses, also continued.

The Red Cross buildings on the corner of Headfort and Newdegate Streets, Greenslopes, were built on land which was part of a parcel of more than 48 acres purchased by the War Services Commission in 1920 from

Stephens Estates Ltd. Most of this land was once part of the land holdings granted to Thomas Blacket Stephens, a wealthy manufacturer, newspaper proprietor and politician. After his death in 1877, it was eventually purchased by Stephens Estates Ltd. in 1904. The remainder of the parcel purchased by the War Services Commission in 1920 was once owned by James Toohey, another early, local landholder.

Sixteen acres of this land, bordered by Denman, Newdegate and Nicholson Streets, was transferred to the Commonwealth of Australia in 1941 and used to establish the 112th Australian General Hospital. During the course of World War II, this facility, used by both Australian and Allied service personnel, became the largest military hospital in the South Pacific. After the conclusion of the war, it was renamed Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital. Although in private hands since 1994, the majority of the hospital's patients continue to be war veterans.

Approval was given by the federal government in December 1944 to acquire a block of land on the corner of Newdegate and Headfort Streets, Greenslopes, for the purpose of building a Red Cross recreation building. In September 1945, the titles for this land, measuring just over 76 perches, were transferred to the Commonwealth of Australia. This is now the site of the Australian Red Cross Centre. A plaque fixed to the exterior of the hall states: "These buildings were provided from funds raised by the voluntary workers of the Red Cross Café – Café profits ?70 635 1941-1945".

The Red Cross Centre was built during World War II to provide recreation services to the military personnel who were patients at the 112th Australian Military Hospital. Many hundreds of soldiers passed through the hospital for medical examination before and after active service in addition to those treated for medical, surgical or other conditions. Thus, large numbers of mobile patients were in need of entertainment and activity. In addition to providing a venue for dances, the exhibition of films and large concerts by well known entertainers, the building provided a base for many other services. These included a library which was originally housed near the Air Force Ward in the hospital but was later moved to the Red Cross building.

The Red Cross Centre was staffed by voluntary Red Cross Workers. Many of these were women who wore the Red Cross uniform complete with hats, gloves, stockings and lace up shoes. The volunteers looked after the library, did office work and "general ward work" such as shopping, taking messages and writing letters for patients. They also cared for the relatives of soldiers who were hospital patients, providing morning teas for both patients and visitors.

After the conclusion of World War II in 1945, the Red Cross Centre continued to provide similar services for service personnel and veterans, such as arts and crafts, a workshop and a separate library for tuberculosis patients. A 1958 photograph shows a group posing in front of the centre about to leave on a Red Cross bus for a picnic excursion.

A report published by the Queensland Division of the Red Cross in 1970 lists their achievements at the Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital for the year 1968-69:

Service to an average daily bed strength of 443 patients; 189 Next-of-Kin of dangerously ill patients accommodated; Films twice weekly; 43 live shows by musical groups, Cards and Hoy parties; Indoor Bowls; Trips to Tambourine Mountain; sponsoring weekly meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon..... [and]....2298 patients and friends served with afternoon tea.¹

The Red Cross Centre is also mentioned in the Annual Report of the Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital for 1989. This document refers to the temporary accommodation and rest area provided for patients' families and the picture framing and picture library facility.

Today, the main Red Cross building consists of a large hall with a stage at the far end and a projection room accessed by a flight of stairs (and a fire escape ladder) at the front of the hall. Both the stage and the projection

room are substantially intact. A small room in the Headfort Street/Newdegate Street corner of the building was originally the supervisor's room (and accommodation). It is now used to store handicraft materials. A side room along the Headfort Street frontage was originally a "ping pong room" and later became the Red Cross library. It is now used by the Red Cross to house an equipment hire service. At the far end of the hall, on either side of the stage, are two caretaker's flats. It is believed these may have originally been storerooms and have since been converted into residential spaces. Kitchenettes and air conditioning were added more recently. The flats are currently used by volunteer caretakers who supervise the buildings after hours. The hall also has a large kitchen. Further research is required to establish the original use and layout of this space. The current laundry at the far end of the lower level was originally a library for tuberculosis patients. This level also contains a workshop area and accommodation.

The smaller adjacent building has been altered internally. It originally contained reading rooms and a library on the upper floor and a billiard room on the ground level. In the 1980s, alterations to the building created small bedrooms which are now used as accommodation for relatives visiting patients in the hospital. More accommodation is provided on the lower floors. This area was formerly used as craft rooms. The billiard room remains intact but the original billiard table was sold as it was rarely used.

Today, the Red Cross Centre at Greenslopes continues to provide many community services. These include an accommodation service, a library service for Greenslopes and other hospitals, a medical equipment hire service, creative therapy for hospital patients and, until recently, a picture framing and loan service for hospitals. The hall is hired to around 10 regular groups for various activities including tai kwon do, line dancing, indoor bowls and senior citizens functions. The accommodation service provides a much needed safe and convenient place to stay, especially for visiting relatives. Many of these are elderly women from the country who appreciate the familiar surroundings and friendly atmosphere of the centre. The accommodation is also sometimes used to provide a place to stay for asylum seekers who are often survivors of torture or other trauma.

In addition to the centre's historical significance as a purpose built Red Cross recreational complex from World War II, the site has strong social significance for the patients and other members of society which it has served, and for the many Red Cross volunteers and workers who have worked at the centre. Some volunteers dedicated several decades to serving the Red Cross at Greenslopes.

Description

Located close to the boundary on the corner of Newdegate Street and Headfort Street, the Red Cross Centre comprises two buildings, with frontages on Newdegate Street: a large two storey timber hall and the neighbouring structure to its north, a smaller two-storey timber building.

The Red Cross hall is predominantly a timber building with some brick features/areas and a corrugated asbestos gabled roof over the hall and additional space attached along either side of the hall roofed with a hipped roof extension at a lower level to the main gable.

The large hall building has a symmetrical front facade with brick pillars to the front at either side of the doorway. The use of rectangular windows divided into narrow vertical sections and the pillars emphasise the verticality of this building. The hall name 'Australian Red Cross Centre' is mounted on the building front above the entry door.

The building is partly clad with horizontal boarding and partly with flat rectangular vertical panels with narrow cover strips (these panels cover a wide section in the central area of the external walls). The building retains its integrity in its external appearance as well as its interior.

The adjacent building, like the large hall, is a timber structure with a corrugated asbestos roof and a street-facing gable. An open footbridge connects the two buildings at the side. External steps parallel to either side of this building provide access.

The two buildings, which have coexisted on the site for more than fifty-five years, make an important contribution to the streetscape of both Newdegate Street and Headfort Street.

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 it provides evidence of the work of the Red Cross Society in Brisbane, and particularly Greenslopes, during World War II and in the subsequent decades.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as the buildings are rare surviving examples of purpose built World War II recreational buildings in Brisbane.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as the main Red Cross hall is significant as an example of a purpose built, World War II, recreational building which has retained its stage and projection room.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

for its special association for over half a century with members of the local community, particularly the past and present patients of the Greenslopes Hospital, the veteran community of Brisbane and Red Cross workers and volunteers.

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 the site has had a long association with the Australian Red Cross Society, an important charitable organisation in Brisbane's history.

References

1. National Australian Archives (Qld); Department of the Interior; J/56, Greenslopes – Acquisition of Land – Red Cross recreation building, 1944-92; QL 465
2. Australian Red Cross Society, Queensland Division. *Serving and involving the entire community*. Brisbane: The Division, 1970
3. Brandt, Otilie (Lee). *Recollections of the Red Cross Centre*. Handwritten notes in the possession of the Red Cross Centre
4. Campbell, Allan J. *The formation and operation of the Australian Red Cross Society (sixty-two years, 1914-1976)*, Queensland Division. Brisbane: The Society, 1976
5. Goodman, Rupert. *Voluntary Aid Detachments in Peace and War*. Bowen Hills, Qld.: Boolarong, 1991
6. Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital. *Continuing caring – Repatriation General Hospital Greenslopes*. (1988 Annual Report). Greenslopes: The Hospital, 1988
7. John Oxley Library photographs & clippings files

8. National Trust of Queensland. Australian Red Cross Centre, Greenslopes file. BNE 1 /653
 9. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificate of Title records
 10. Stubbings, Leon. *"Look What You Started Henry!": A History of the Australian Red Cross 1914-1991*. East Melbourne: Australian Red Cross Society, 1992
 11. Tweedale, Hope. *Recollections of the Red Cross Centre*. Handwritten notes in possession of the Red Cross Centre
 12. Information kindly supplied by Daphne van Nooten, Coordinator. Australian Red Cross. Greenslopes Red Cross Centre
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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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