

Heritage Citation



Brisbane Mosque

Key details

Addresses At 309 Nursery Road, Holland Park, Queensland 4121; At 311 Nursery Road, Holland Park, Queensland 4121; At 313 Nursery Road, Holland Park, Queensland 4121

Type of place Mosque

Period Late 20th Century 1960-1999

Style Immigrants' Nostalgic

Lot plan L131_RP13270; L130_RP13270; L131_RP13270; L130_RP13270; L131_RP13270; L130_RP13270

Key dates Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2003
Date of Citation — June 2001

Construction Walls: Masonry

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

This mosque, which was constructed between 1968 and 1971, stands on the site of a previous mosque that was built around 1909, and exists as a rare example of traditionally styled, late twentieth century Islamic architecture in Brisbane. The mosque has a strong spiritual and cultural association with the local Islamic community and, together with the original mosque, provides evidence of a Muslim presence in Brisbane, and particularly Holland Park, since the early twentieth century. The mosque is still in use by the Muslim community and is currently the headquarters for the Islamic Society of Holland Park.

History

The first Muslim settlers in Australia were Afghan camel drivers, who arrived here between the years 1867 and 1910. Between 2000 and 4000 cameleers came to Australia to provide transport in outback regions. They were originally engaged by colonial businessmen, but soon moved to independent, contracting. They worked in the arid regions of South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales and were an important component in the development of the colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century. Historian, Christine Stevens, states that the camel drivers provided "a vital lifeline for the developing continent." They were also the first people to bring the Qur'an (Koran) to Australia.

The first camel drivers arrived from Karachi in 1860, hired to take part in the Bourke and Wills expedition. While that expedition famously perished, the cameleers made a strong impression, and a wealthy South Australian grazier named Samuel Stuckley recognised that they would be ideal for a commercial haulage concern in the arid parts of the new colony. The camel trains carried food, building materials, furniture and equipment to the isolated stations and enterprises in arid Australia, and regularly took part in discovery expeditions throughout the 1870s and 1880s. They also played a part in the construction of the overland telegraph line. Presently, other Australian colonies recognised the benefits of camel transport for their own interior regions. Soon camels were bred in Australia and recruiting agents made trips to Karachi to hire more drivers. Many drivers came to Australia with the encouragement of those who had finished their contracts and had returned home.

Motorised transport was introduced into the Australian interior in the 1920s. This immediately destroyed the camel transport industry, and the Afghans now had neither transport contracts nor markets for their camels. However, difficulties had arisen even before this. The new Australian Commonwealth Government had adopted its so called "white Australia policy", and now non-Europeans could not gain naturalisation or bring families to the country. With these restrictions, and steadily reducing employment opportunities there was little incentive at all for Afghans, or Muslims in general, to come to Australia. Many returned to their homelands and a diminishing and ageing group was left behind.

These factors made the path for Islam in Australia a hard one, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. In Western Australia, a mosque was laid down in 1905 but the builders had to provide their own land as the government denied them the customary land grant that was given to other churches. Australia at this time was a nation that did not value pluralism or embrace cultural diversity outside the white Anglo-Celtic mainstream. Muslims, like many others were considered "outsiders," and often felt the odious weight of Australia's racist attitudes.

By 1921, Muslim numbers in Australia had dropped to less than 3000. A few Albanian migrants came to Australia at this time and worked as labourers in Western Australia, Queensland, and Victoria through the 1920s and 1930s. These migrants were mostly male and often very young (some as young as fifteen), and were seeking to earn enough money to return to Albania, buy farms and provide for their futures.

There was not to be a resurgence in Muslim numbers and culture in Australia until the years following the Second World War, when changes in immigration policy, the desire to increase Australia's population, and a shortfall in British migration made conditions favourable for the acceptance of persons of variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds into Australia. The postwar period has seen the most significant influx of Islamic peoples in Australia's history. By the mid-1990s, the Muslim population in Australia had risen to around 200 000. Almost all of these people arrived since the Second World War. With their arrival, the mosque has become an increasingly familiar sight in the residential suburbs of Australian cities, including Brisbane.

The mosque has been described as "The physical symbol of the presence of Islam." Certainly, wherever Muslims have gone in Australia they have established mosques. The first mosque was established in 1890 outside Adelaide by Afghan camel drivers. Further mosques were to follow in South Australia and Western Australia. By 1994, there were 57 mosques in Australia.

While some purpose built mosques reflect many traditional elements drawn from the distinctive architectures of Islamic countries, the configuration of the mosque was never of utmost important to migrant Muslims. Often a mud hut would serve the purpose. This tradition continues to this day where the minority of mosques in Australia are purpose built structures. In NSW in 1985, only two of the existing eleven mosques were purpose designed. Many are conversions of other buildings, often with the barest few additions that appear distinctively Islamic.

The mosque's main function is as a place of daily prayer. All the other functions of mosques whether it be as Sunday schools, social venues, or bases for ethnic and cultural associations are of secondary importance. Mosques are generally financed by the local Muslim community, sometimes with help from Muslims overseas. All mosques are managed by a local Islamic association.

The Mosque has been essential to the development of Islamic identity in Australia. As anthropologist Gary D. Bouma says:

mosques have provided a context for self-identification in the new homeland. As Muslims have had to struggle to gather the necessary resources to build these centres of worship and the expression, interpretation, inculcation and celebration of their religious culture, they have forged links with each other and the larger communities of which they are part. As they have had to fight often bitterly contested battles to gain permission to erect mosques, schools and cultural centres, they have developed an identity as Australian Muslims.

It took time for mosques to become well established in Australia. Nevertheless, the emotional rewards of constructing a mosque could be very significant within the Muslim community. As Bouma notes:

the building of a mosque was... a significant feature in the settlement of immigrants who had arrived before a mosque was established. The existence of a mosque provided an emotional resolution, or focal point, for some Muslim immigrants. They finally felt that Australia had become a home for them.

The construction of mosques is thus an essential component in the Muslim settlement of Australia. The mosque represents an element of home and their construction here has represented the acceptance of Australia as a new "home" for Islamic immigrants. In the postwar world, mosques gained a new importance for migrating Muslims. New arrivals tended to seek out places to live that were near a mosque as in the locale they would find other Muslims, shops selling halal food, and service provided in their language. The mosque has become a focal point for growing Muslim communities.

The Brisbane Mosque stands on land that was originally part of portion 196 - first sold by the Crown to James Stone in 1865. The block, more that 24 acres in size, was sold to Henry Orr in 1873, and then to James Yates in

1878. From here it passed to John Fogarty who held the land until 1904 when his land was sold off to recover funds from his bankrupt estate. At this time the land was subdivided, and these subdivisions continued right up to 1940. The Corporation of the Mohammedan Mosque purchased subdivisions 1 and 2 of section 4 in 1909. The total size of the block was 34 perches. The Corporation has held the land ever since.

According to local historian, Gwen Robinson, a mosque was established on the land about the same time the purchase was made. Robinson asserts that the land was actually owned by an Afghan migrant named Abdullah Khan who arrived in the area in the late 1890s. Khan changed his name to the more European sounding Kauss sometime around 1900. Robinson also states that the mosque was established in the Kauss' paddock. Aerial photographs taken in 1936 show a structure on the land occupying the same position and with the same orientation as the present Mosque. The general configuration of the building accords with the drawing given in the City Council sewerage plan dated 1962. Council records show some minor alterations carried out on this building, prior to the construction of the present mosque from 1968-71.

A review of the historical title deeds to the land on which the mosque stands, and the surrounding areas, reveals many Muslim names. Each of these people bought subdivisions near the site of the Mosque. Some of the names that appear in the titles are: Mollah (1907), Deen (1907), Dullah (1910), Ramah (1911), Aberdan (1911), Omideen (1912), Kahn (1913), Ramah (1912), Ramah (1914), Deen (1915), Hejara (1915), and one Tom Afghan (1928). "Abdul Kaus" also appears (1910). This pattern of land ownership obviously points to the development of a substantial Muslim enclave in the area. According to Robinson the Khans established farms, growing cotton and mangoes. Another Afghan family, the Howsans, set up a small quilt and mattress factory there. Robinson also relates oral evidence that camels were a common sight in the area for a time, and that Fazel and Noor Deen, who had been camel drivers, came to live in the district, probably bringing camels with them. The Deen name appears in the title deeds, but neither of these first names are also present.

The original mosque on this site was one of the earliest established in Australia. Further, as the only significant group of Islamic people in the country at this time were those who had come to Australia to drive the camel trains, it is reasonable to assume that members of this group, the original Muslim migrants to this country, established the mosque. It is not known whether Kahn was a camel driver himself, but it is quite probable. Afghan cameleers were active in Queensland and by the 1900s many had married and established families. It was not uncommon for Afghans to marry white women in Australia, especially widows or abandoned wives. Gwen Robinson notes that Kahn brought an English wife to Holland Park with him.

At the time the land was purchased, and for several decades after, much of the surrounding countryside remained undeveloped. Pre-war aerial photographs show the area in rural use, with only the beginnings of the later massive housing development in this area then evident. In 1909 this was the outskirts of the city of Brisbane and given the racial and cultural prejudices of the time, and the intention of the occupants to farm the land, it is an understandable location for the formation of an Islamic enclave in the city of Brisbane.

The present Mosque was constructed between 1968 and 1971 with some funding support from King Faisal of Saudi Arabia who contributed 1000 pounds sterling to its construction. Since 1964, when Faisal became King, he presided over large social and economic reforms in his country and greatly increased education spending, some of which was allocated to Islamic projects in foreign countries. The Mosque at Nursery Road was a beneficiary of this programme. It is one of a number of mosques that have been constructed in Brisbane in the last thirty years, but is notable as one of the few purpose built and traditionally styled examples. Many are conversions of other buildings, frequently ecclesiastical ones, or are adaptations of contemporary Australian architectural styles.

The mosque is presently in use and is currently the headquarters of the Islamic Society of Holland Park.

Description

Sited above Nursery Road on the corner of Crest Street in Holland Park, the Brisbane Mosque capitalises on the terrain, which is elevated on a hill for prominence, overlooking the residences to the north-east.

The Mosque is predominantly a two storey masonry building with a symmetrical front facade and a rendered dome with the symbolic Islamic crescent at its peak in the centre of its flat roof. Four slender decorative piers stand tall at its four corners in the fashion of similar buildings in the Islamic tradition.

The main building has a square plan and geometrically expressive elevations with its facade containing two wide rendered bands with inscriptions. A series of reinforcing columns along the sidewalls of the mosque provide stiffening to the high walls. Windows are arranged between the columns on the sidewalls also symmetrical in appearance. Later additions have been built to the rear.

The main entry door consists of a pair of timber doors. Windows are symmetrically located on either side of this entrance in the central area between the entrance and the corner of the building. At the upper level window openings with semi-circular arch heads have been in-filled with stone. Here the central area is a projecting cylinder with a domed top.

A stepped retaining wall at the site boundary is masonry with a utilitarian wire fence above.

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 evidence of the presence of an Islamic community in Holland Park since at least the mid to late twentieth century.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as the mosque presents many distinctive architectural attributes typical of Islamic religious architecture that are rare in Brisbane.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a mosque crafted in a typical Islamic style, embodying many of the features of this type of architecture.

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

as an important focal point for the migrant Muslim community; and as a site of importance for the Brisbane Islamic community for more than a century.

References

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4. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificate of Titles
5. Jones, Mary Lucile (ed.). *An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. Victoria press, 1993
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7. Jones, Mary Lucile. 'To rebuild what was lost: the post war years and beyond,' in *An Australian Pilgrimage*
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9. Queensland Post Office Directories
10. Robinson, Gwen. *Mt Gravatt: Bush to Suburb*. Brisbane: self published, 1988
11. Stevens, Christine. "Afghan camel drivers: founders of Islam in Australia," in *An Australian Pilgrimage*

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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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