

## Heritage Citation



### Chermide Telephone Exchange

#### Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 9 Mermaid Street, Chermide, Queensland 4032
<b>Type of place</b>	Telephone exchange
<b>Period</b>	Postwar 1945-1960
<b>Style</b>	Queenslander
<b>Lot plan</b>	L2_RP65082; L28_RP41009
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 November 2012 Date of Citation — June 2011
<b>Construction</b>	Roof: Terracotta tile; Walls: Face brick

The Chermside Telephone Exchange is indicative of the extensive change that occurred in the Chermside district during the post-war era. The influx of new housing estates and swift increase in population in the area heralded a new era for Chermside. No longer a semi-rural, light industrial area, by the mid-1950s it had become one of Brisbane's most bustling and successful suburbs. A reliable communications service was needed. The Post Master General's Department constructed a brick automatic telephone exchange on Mermaid Street, Chermside in 1951-52 as a response.

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## History

On 28 January 1878, the first successful experiment with the new telephone system was made in Queensland when a successful call was put through from Brisbane to Ipswich. Brisbane's (and Queensland's) first telephone exchange opened at the Brisbane General Post Office in 1880. As technology improved the automatic telephone exchange was established. In 1925 the first automatic telephone exchange in Queensland was installed at South Brisbane, with the Brisbane Central Exchange in the General Post Office Building becoming automatic in 1929.

The early twentieth century was a time of civic development for Chermside. The school building was constructed in 1900. A police station opened in 1904 and a School of Arts was formed in 1909 and their hall became the local library and branch of the Government Savings Bank.

After the First World War a number of war veterans moved to Chermside and the local population grew, influencing the subsequent development in the area. In 1901 the population of the district was 649, by 1933 it had risen to 2, 319.

After the Second World War, Chermside developed into a trendy, new suburb that attracted a number of Mater Prize Homes. The suburb was chosen as the site of the first public hospital to be built after the war, when the Chermside Tuberculosis Chest Clinic (now Prince Charles Hospital) opened in 1954.

The post-war development in the Chermside district consisted of large estates, both housing commission, war service homes and private estates, being built in Wavell Heights, Chermside and Kedron. In 1947 Chermside had a population of 4435 people and by 1954 this had risen to 14 702 people. As the population of the Chermside District increased in the post-war period the need for communication infrastructure became apparent. Prior to the construction of the Chermside Telephone Exchange the area had had telephone services connected through the Albion Telephone Exchange. However, with the increased demand for efficient communication services a new automatic telephone exchange was proposed for Chermside.

In 1949, as a direct response to the increase in the district's population a makeshift automatic telephone exchange was established on the corner of Mermaid Street and Gympie Road. The initial exchange was housed in a 'decommissioned' United States Army timber hut, previously used at the 'Chermside Army Camp'. This automatic telephone exchange was viewed by the telephone authority as temporary.

In the early 1950s plans were drawn up by the Commonwealth Government Department of Works, Queensland Branch for the construction of a permanent automatic telephone exchange on Mermaid Street. The large brick

building was to be built on a vacant site on Mermaid Street. The construction of the Chermside exchange was part of a national push for improved telephonic infrastructure throughout the country. Specifically, Queensland was allocated almost £8 million for this work with £2 million of this to be used for the construction of new automatic telephone exchanges throughout the State. As far back as 1946 these improvements were being planned with an emphasis on rural infrastructure. In September 1946 the Courier Mail reported that “New automatic telephone exchanges would be built soon at Toowong, Valley, Camp Hill, Ashgrove, Chermside...”<sup>1</sup>.

In February 1951 a £31 000 contract was given to K.D Morris and Sons, builders, for the construction of the new brick automatic telephone exchange for Chermside. In 1965 an extension was made to the telephone exchange in response to the district’s growth.

The Chermside Automatic Telephone Exchange is important in demonstrating the district’s need for improved telephonic infrastructure in the post-war period as the area’s population expanded dramatically. The design of the building is reflective of 1950s civic construction.

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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

the Chermside Telephone Exchange demonstrates the need for efficient communication networks in the immediate post-war era as a response to the intensive population increase in the Chermside district.

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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 Chermside's first permanent automatic telephone exchange built as part of the Commonwealth Government's post-war program of improving the country's telephonic infrastructure.

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## References

1. *Courier Mail*, Monday 23 September 1946, p4
2. Commonwealth Archives. *Plans for Chermside Automatic Telephone Exchange*
3. Post Office Directories.
4. Rea, Malcolm. *An Australian Post Office History: Nundah*. (Australia Post. 1972)
5. University of Queensland, Queensland Places, <http://queenslandplaces.com.au/home>
6. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
7. Brisbane City Council Water Supply & Sewerage Detail Plans
8. Queensland Certificates of Title
9. *The Courier Mail*, Tuesday 20 July 1948, p3
10. *The Courier Mail*, Monday 23 September 1946, p4
11. *The Courier Mail*, Tuesday 22 February 1949, p5
12. *The Courier Mail*, Saturday 17 February 1951, p5
13. *The Courier Mail*, Friday 25 May 1951, p5

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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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