



Heritage Citation



Grosvenor Hotel

Key details

Also known as	Grosvenor on George
Addresses	At 320 George Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Hotel (pub)
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Free Classical
Lot plan	L1_RP217755; L2_RP776; L5_RP776; L4_RP776
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2009 Date of Citation — January 2008

People/associations G.H.M. Addison and Son (1926 additions) (Architect);
John Richard Hall (Architect)

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

The Grosvenor Hotel was constructed in 1881-82 at the southwest corner of George and Ann Streets, and is the only example of a CBD building designed by prominent architect J. R. Hall. It is one of the few pre-1946 corner hotels remaining in the CBD, which was once dominated by such buildings. The Grosvenor derived part of its trade from its proximity to the Supreme Court building and the hotel has remained an integral part of the legal precinct in George Street.

History

The Grosvenor Hotel was erected in 1881-82 at the south-west corner of George and Ann Streets. This site was previously occupied by another corner hotel, the Volunteer Arms, that was constructed in 1862. The impetus for the construction of a new hotel on the site no doubt came from the opening of a new Supreme Court building at the southeast corner of George and Ann Streets in 1879. The location of the Supreme Court drew many of Brisbane's lawyers to establish their offices close-by in Ann, Adelaide and George Streets. Thus the new Grosvenor Hotel would appeal to the legal fraternity and it could also expect to draw passing trade from people visiting Brisbane's first railway station in Roma Street, which opened in 1873.

Built during the 1880s economic boom, the new Grosvenor Hotel reflected the confidence and prosperity that permeated the colony of Queensland at this time. The owners of the 320 George Street property, Henry John Ferguson, Margaret Mortimer and Charles Mortimer contracted the architect and property speculator John Richard Hall (1835-83) to design the Grosvenor Hotel. Hall was a prominent Brisbane architect who began his private practice in 1864 before going into partnership with his son Francis Richard Hall in 1883. Between 1864 and 1883, J. R. Hall designed five hotels and planned additions for four other hotels in Brisbane. All except the Kedron Park Hotel were in the Central Business District (CBD) and the Grosvenor Hotel is the only remaining example of J. R. Hall's CBD hotel designs. Indeed of Hall's 34 commercial building (including hotel) designs in Brisbane, only three examples remain – the Forester's Hall in Fortitude Valley and the Kedron Park and the Grosvenor Hotels. The vast majority of J. R. Hall's commercial designs were for CBD buildings, of which only the Grosvenor Hotel remains.

The first licensee of the Grosvenor Hotel was Albert Albertson, who had previously run the old Supreme Court Hotel. In 1886, William Brown became the second licensee of the new hotel, though he appears to have been acting on behalf of a number of other business people, for he immediately transferred his lease to Edward and Nickolas Fitzgerald, Robert Pendergast, George Wilkie and George and Kate Quinlan. Brown remained the registered licensee and by 1887, he was using the goodwill he had built up as the former proprietor of the North Australian Hotel, in order to attract customers to the Grosvenor Hotel.

Advertising for the hotel emphasised both the quality of its facilities and its prime location:

(Facing the Supreme Court, Land Office &c. Three Minutes to the Railway Station.) This First-class and Popular Hotel has accommodation for VISITORS and FAMILIES unsurpassed by any hotel in the Colony.¹

The Grosvenor Hotel's proximity to the Supreme Court and Roma Street Station made it a significant building in the evolving George Street retail precinct. The Supreme Court building had effectively cut George Street into two components. Subsequent government building programs turned the eastern end of George Street into a government precinct. Pedestrian and road traffic to and from Roma Street Station attracted businesses to the western (upper) end of George Street. With the construction of the Transcontinental Hotel in 1883-84 near the intersection of George and Roma Streets and across from Roma Street Station, the Grosvenor Hotel became one of two bookend buildings marking the George Street shopping precinct. Between these two hotels, a number of modest two-storey commercial buildings were erected for diverse businesses such as Sleath's music store and tailors Duncalfe & Co with the result that "George Street west of Ann Street became a legitimate shopping strip in its own right".² The Brisbane Municipal Markets relocation to Roma Street in 1884 brought even more trade to the George Street shopping precinct. The advent of electric trams along George Street from 1897 brought further custom to this precinct.

With the increasing trade, particularly in providing accommodation, the new Grosvenor Hotel had to be extended by 1883, just a few years after opening. J. R. Hall again was commissioned to design this extension, though by this time, he was in partnership with F. R. Hall as John Hall & Son. The death of J. R. Hall in 1883 may have caused a delay in the project because the Grosvenor Hotel extension at 332 George Street was not completed until 1886. In 1891, the architect Francis Frazer added stables, a fence and a retaining wall to the hotel complex.

In 1888, the lease for the Grosvenor Hotel was transferred to the Castlemaine Brewery and Quinlan Gray & Co, the company that would eventually become Queensland's most famous brewer, Castlemaine Perkins. The company had first released its Castlemaine XXX Sparkling Ale to the public in 1878 and by the 1880s, another 'X' was added to the brand and the XXXX trademark was registered in the 1890s. In this period major brewers bought hotels or secured leases to them to ensure sale of their product. Thus the Grosvenor Hotel would have been one of the first XXXX hotels in Brisbane, an association which continued into the twentieth century. From 1890 to 1900, the company placed an almost yearly succession of licensees in charge of the Grosvenor Hotel before John A. Alexander took over in 1901. He ran the hotel for the next eight years and then Edward McGregor took over and managed it through to 1919. Castlemaine Brewery and Quinlan Gray & Co finally bought the hotel in 1924. In the same year the company sold the extension to the adjacent business, Duncalfe & Co.

It was during the period (1921-28) of John James Murphy's licence that this nineteenth century hotel was given a twentieth century makeover. The architectural firm of G. H. M. Addison & Son designed further additions to the hotel building in 1926. In 1929, the hotel's front façade was remodelled and elevated in an effort to modernise it. Following the hotel style of that time, the supported awnings along Ann and George Streets were removed and replaced by flat canopies attached to the hotel by iron ties. Pressed metal ceilings were placed under these canopies replacing the nineteenth century open curved iron roofing. The iron-roofed first floor verandahs that faced both Ann and George Streets were also taken away while their exterior doorways were remodelled as vestigial window hoods. The roof overhang was reduced to the extent that only a parapet gutter detail remained. Similar alterations were carried out on many of the CBD's older hotels at this time. Not only did these hotel renovations contribute to the 1920s building boom in the CBD but, along with the many new buildings, served to convert Brisbane into a contemporary metropolis. This was certainly the case with the Grosvenor Hotel's 1929 renovations, which were heralded as bringing "the modern touch into what was an old façade, and this, with

other improvements to the place will add to the tone of the locality”.³ After Murphy’s death on 12 November 1928, his wife, Margaret Mary Murphy became the licensee in 1929 and she managed the hotel through both the Great Depression and World War Two.

As would be expected of a business that has to stay abreast of ever changing trends in hotel patronage, the Grosvenor Hotel has undergone a number of make-overs through the post-war years. Alterations and additions were made in 1953 and that same year, the then licensee, Mrs. Delahunty, commissioned celebrated Brisbane artist Margaret Olley to paint a mural in the saloon bar. Olley took more than three months and was paid £300 to depict various Brisbane street scenes from 1882 to 1953. This artwork would eventually be valued at between \$250,000 and \$500,000 and was a popular attraction for the hotel’s patrons. Margaret Olley’s mural was destroyed and much of the interior of the hotel severely altered after American fast food chain McDonalds purchased the building in 1985 for conversion into a hamburger restaurant, training facility and headquarters. The ground floor became one of the new-style “McCafes” while the first floor interior was remodelled into offices and training areas. The interior timber stairs were replaced with steel framed staircases within the hotel as part of the refurbishment. Further internal alterations occurred in 2001 after wellknown Brisbane hotelier Peter Austin spent \$1 million on a sympathetic renovation and fit-out program so that the building could be returned to hotel use as the Grosvenor on George. Corner pubs within the CBD became familiar landmarks by which the public could easily identify a particular intersection. The number of hotels within the CBD probably reached a peak just prior to World War Two. By 1951, the number of hotels in the CBD, including private hotels such as the Atcherley, totalled 33 and the majority of these were located on street corner sites.

The pressure of commercial development on CBD corner sites, the change in drinking habits caused by the state government’s drink driving campaigns and the spread of off-licence beer, wine and spirits shops throughout Brisbane’s suburbs have all contributed to the demise of corner hotels in the CBD. Of the 33 hotel sites identified in 1951, only 11 remain, of which only eight pubs are in the buildings shown in the Fire Maps of that period. The Grosvenor undoubtedly resisted this trend due to its proximity to the Supreme Court. The remaining three sites have had their hotels rebuilt as high rise buildings with the pub on the ground floor. But the return to innercity living in the last decade may reverse this trend, such that the remaining corner hotels may once again become ‘the local’ to scores of residents moving into the new inner-city apartment towers.

The hotel’s long association with the Supreme Court and Brisbane’s legal fraternity is significant. Indeed, it was so frequented by lawyers and legal staff that the hotel was alternatively known as “The Grosvenor School of Law”.⁴ Brisbane’s legal community attended a “black tie affair” to mark the hotel’s closure in 1985.⁵ The legal community was also strongly represented following the re-opening of the hotel in 2001, once again illustrating the significance of the proximity of the hotel to Brisbane’s Supreme Court.

Moreover, the hotel has not undergone any name changes since its construction. Given its continuing proximity to Brisbane’s legal precinct in George Street and a number of surviving nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings in the upper George Street precinct, and its longevity as a hotel, the Grosvenor is an important aspect of the CBD’s history.

Description

The Grosvenor Hotel, a two-storey masonry structure, was originally built in the typical fashion of the Victorian Filigree style with an intricately textured verandah screen shading the main building mass.

The building had an upper veranda with cast iron railing and street-level awning, which wrapped around both George and Ann Street elevations. The upper veranda and the awning both had slender posts and were adorned with cast iron brackets and fringe panels.

The veranda with all its cast iron adornments has since been removed. The original street awning has been replaced by one suspended from the façade in an effort to modernise the building.

The interior of the Grosvenor Hotel has undergone a number of major alterations in the course of time, particularly at the ground level.

But the exterior of the Grosvenor Hotel does retain ‘the external form of an 1880’s hotel’ particularly through “its corner orientation and its two-storey form”.⁶ The George and Ann Street external façades, though, reflect the modernisation of many Brisbane’s CBD hotels, that occurred during the 1920s.

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:

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city’s or local area’s cultural heritage as the only remaining example of a CBD building designed by prominent Brisbane architect John Richard Hall.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

with its external appearance retaining the form of a CBD two-storey corner hotel.

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 a building designed by prominent Brisbane architect John Richard Hall, and for its strong links to Brisbane's legal community.

References

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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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