

Heritage Citation

Robrae

Key details

Addresses	At 29 Ryans Road, St Lucia, Queensland 4067
Type of place	House
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Italianate, Stripped Classical
Lot plan	L6_RP81840
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 17 May 2013 Date of Citation — January 2013
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic

'Robrae' was designed by respected Brisbane architect George Rae and built in 1938 as his residence. The two-storey masonry house is representative of the area's development in the interwar era as a fashionable suburb that attracted the professional and affluent seeking to build innovative architect-designed homes. During the Second World War the house was requisitioned by the Australian Defence Forces and became home to General Sir Thomas A. Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of Australian Military Forces throughout the war. 'Robrae' remains one of only a small number of architect designed interwar houses built in St. Lucia.

History

The interwar period heralded a new wave of residential development in the St. Lucia area. Much of Brisbane at this time saw a dramatic increase in home building to cater for an increased population; the majority of housing stock constructed at this time was the 'traditional' timber character house. In a move away from this some Brisbane residents, mainly professionals, purchased land in the slowly developing St. Lucia area on which to build architect designed houses. Several fashionable interwar houses were built in the area in the interwar

period, including 29 Ryans Road.

In 1938 George Rae purchased two twenty-four perch blocks on the corner of Ryans Road and Jerdanefield Road, St. Lucia. In July of that year Rae received approval for the construction of a brick house on the property. The cost was estimated to be £1750 and the builders were to be Constructors Ltd. At this time George Rae was a successful and respected Brisbane architect; he designed the house himself.

As one of Brisbane's most successful architects in the interwar period, George Rae had first established his own architectural firm in 1933. Prior to this he had been employed at the larger Brisbane firm of Atkinson, Conrad and Powell. Rae was renowned for designing modern buildings in Brisbane in the interwar period such as multi-unit residential buildings that were a very new idea in this period. The purpose built block of self-contained flats was marketed mainly at single people and childless couples and the earliest self-contained flats in Brisbane were generally conveniently situated close to trams, trains and shopping facilities in inner-city suburbs such as Spring Hill, New Farm and Fortitude Valley. Although seen as a sophisticated lifestyle, flat living was fairly uncommon in Brisbane in this period, with only 8.4% of Brisbane residents living in flats. Rae designed several important Brisbane examples such as 'Greystaines' on Kingsford Smith Drive, 'Green Gables' at New Farm, 'Casa del Mar' at New Farm and 'Highveiw' at Highgate Hill. Rae was also credited as being one of the leading architects for designing picture theatres in this period in Queensland.

In July 1938 the *Telegraph* featured an article on Rae's new design for his home. Prior to the building of the house and in an unusual break from tradition, Rae constructed a model of the design. The article stated, "the use of a model... affords a splendid opportunity for applying different colours with the object of producing the most suitable scheme for decoration".¹ The model clearly portrayed the modern design of the large house in which "the architect has introduced a touch of the Colonial and the modern with the idea of arriving at a structure best expressing the owners' own ideas and requirements as well as to produce a pleasing effect architecturally". The masonry house was constructed in 1938.

The design of the house was applauded in 1939 by the 'Better Homes' article series in the *Telegraph*. In a full page article 'Robrae' was stated to be an expression of the architect's vision of an ideal home. The modern design of the house was outlined, both exterior and interior, and the article stated:

The exterior is an outstanding example of the modified Georgian character in which decidedly modern treatment has been introduced to certain features with perfect harmony. This modern motif is particularly noticeable at the entrance porch in the use of sheer surfaces, a horizontal canopy in character with a horizontal band of bricks contrasting with the clean texture of the walls and in the glass bricks that frame the vertically-lined door.²

The entrance to the house, in particular, received attention as a very modern feature of the house, so much so that in July 1939 the entrance was featured in an article in *The Courier Mail* highlighting modern designs of entrance-ways in new houses, "In Mr. Rae's home the door is framed in glass bricks through which the hall lights shine. A round white globe to light the step is unobtrusive above the door."³ The entrance to 'Robrae' was said to be a fine example of an individualistic design that not only gave distinction to the house but also was welcoming to visitors.

During the Second World War 'Robrae' played an important role as Brisbane became the centre for military activity. Although Australia had been at war with Germany since 1939, the impact of war increased dramatically after the Japanese entered the battle in 1941. The Japanese forces swept south through Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies and had reached New Guinea by January 1942. Northern Australia became a major staging point. General Headquarters South West Pacific Area, under the command of US General Douglas MacArthur, was moved to Brisbane in July 1942. An unprecedented military build-up followed.

The newly constructed University of Queensland became the Advanced Land Headquarters of the Allied Defence Forces (Landops) from August 1942 to December 1944. Under the command of General Sir Thomas A. Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of Australian Military Forces, the University of Queensland played a key role in the South West Pacific Campaign. With the influx of military personnel in St. Lucia several properties were requisitioned by the Australian Military's Hirings Service. 'Robrae' was requisitioned in 1942 to be used as General Blamey's residence for the duration of the conflict. The large homestead 'Jerdanefield', across the road from 'Robrae', on the corner of Ryans and Jerdanefield Road, was also requisitioned for use as the Commander-in-Chief's Officer's Mess. Certainly, Blamey did not stay at the house consistently throughout the War as his duties took him into the field of conflict in the Pacific. 'Robrae' is important in the context of Brisbane's role in the war for its direct association with Blamey. 'Jerdanefield' has since been demolished. 'Robrae' reflects the intense war time activity that occurred in St. Lucia during the Second World War.

At the cessation of the War 'Robrae' was handed back to the Rae household. The property was subsequently sold in 1945 to Arthur Stanley Grimwade.

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 the self-designed residence of Brisbane architect, George Rae, which is representative of the trend for professional Brisbane residents to build fashionable houses in the suburb of St. Lucia in the interwar period; and as the war-time residence of General Sir Thomas A. Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of Australian Military Forces it is important in demonstrating the intense military activity that occurred in St. Lucia during the Second World War.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an architect-designed, two-storey masonry house built on a prominent corner in St. Lucia, 'Robrae' is important as it includes many interwar design features that were highly fashionable at the time such as the entranceway that incorporated the use of glass bricks.

References

1. *The Telegraph* Tuesday Evening July 5 1938
2. *The Telegraph* Tuesday Evening May 9 1939
3. *The Courier Mail* Tuesday 11 July 1939, p13
4. Judy Gale Rechner, *Brisbane House Styles 1880 to 1940: a guide to the affordable house*, Brisbane: Brisbane History Group Studies No. 2, 1998
5. Historic Titles, Department of Environment and Resource Management
6. Queensland Post Office Directories
7. *Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Survey Maps*
8. Queensland Electoral Rolls
9. Brisbane City Council Building Register 1938
10. Apperley, Richard and Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guild to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney, 1989
11. Heritage Citation, "University of Queensland, Great Court Complex", Department of Environment and Resource Management
12. Moore, Clive, *The Forgan Smith: History of a Building and its People at the University of Queensland*, UQ Press, St Lucia, 2010
13. Australian Dictionary of Biography, "Blamey, Sir Thomas Albert"
14. "Requisition of Property", Hirings Service Commonwealth of Australia, Ryans Rd, St. Lucia, 1942, AWM

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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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