

Heritage Citation



Rocklea Munitions Works - Magazine 8A (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 32 Industries Road, Salisbury, Queensland 4107
Type of place	Defence site
Period	World War II 1939-1945
Lot plan	L5_SL11589
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2005 Date of Citation — June 2004
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Face brick

People/associations	Civil Construction Corp (Builder); Department of the Interior Works and Services Branch (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (G) Social

The former Magazine 8A is important as one of the Rocklea Munitions Works buildings, which was the only ammunition factory of its kind constructed in Queensland during World War II. At its peak, the Works employed up to 3,000 workers each day. A strong link has been made between the work undertaken in the munitions industry by workers, especially women, and postwar changes in employment. The former Magazine 8A is the only remaining cordite magazine within the former Works complex. Its design features the principal characteristics of a magazine constructed to house explosives.

History

This former Cordite Magazine (Building 8A) was constructed in 1941-42, one of approximately eighty buildings that comprised the Rocklea Munitions Works. Until the closure of the Works it was used to house cordite and percussion caps.

The Rocklea Munitions Works

Consisting principally of two Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) plants, known together as SAA Factory No. 5, and a cartridge case factory, the Rocklea Munitions Works (RMW) was established to supply ammunition to the Eastern Supply Group. Although at the time Queensland was strategically vulnerable, construction of a munitions facility in Brisbane was undertaken to decentralise production and take advantage of an available workforce. Between March 1942 and October 1943 a total of 137,729,208 million rounds of small arms ammunition were produced at the RMW, as well as 1,221,122 brass cartridge cases for 25-pounder shells.

The RMW was constructed on land to the north and south of Evans Road, then known as Compo Road. Prior to the Second World War, although suburban development was slowly occurring on the area, the predominant land usage was still primary production. South of Compo Road James Greer and Ernest Barstow had operated slaughter yards on their respective properties backing on to Rocky Water Holes Creek. The establishment of a Queensland Meat Industry Board and the operation of an abattoir at Cannon Hill as a State utility for the City of Brisbane led to the closure in the early 1930s of private slaughter yards such as those in Compo Road. For the next decade the land was used for grazing purposes.

North of Compo Road, Kathleen Quine, Elijah and Alice Beckett and Janet Jensen operated poultry farms during the interwar years. James Greer also owned land on the north of Compo Road. In expectation of residential growth, Greer had subdivided his 16 acre Portion 205 into 67 allotments. By late 1940 none had sold.

As likelihood of war became more apparent, the Minister of Defence announced a rearmament program. This first period of expansion from December 1938 focused on southern states where both raw materials and labour were in close proximity. In June 1940 a second round of munition factory building commenced. A new SAA factory was constructed at Hendon, South Australia, and a cartridge case factory at Finsbury, also in South Australia.

Early in 1941 the Commonwealth announced that an initial £1,500,000 would be spent in the construction of a Small Arms Ammunition factory at Rocklea, Queensland. The Director-General of Munitions, Essington Lewis, chose the Compo Road site on advice from Department of Munitions officers during a visit on 22 January 1941. The site was considered favourable because it was reasonably flat and above flood level, could be provided readily with road, rail, electricity, water and gas services and was accessible to populated areas.

From February 1941 the Works and Services Branch of the Department of the Interior prepared the plans needed for the RMW. As some of the Small Arms Ammunition section was to be a duplication of factories in southern states, Department of Interior officer Clive Heath made a hurried visit to Melbourne to study already established Small Arms Ammunition factories. Where possible plans were sourced from Victoria or traced off pre-existing plans. The Small Arms Ammunition factory at Rocklea commenced operations in November 1941, ten months after the site was chosen. The cost of completing the buildings, works, services, air raid precautions and camouflage at the Munitions Works amounted to £989,288.

Establishment of the Rocklea Munitions Works involved:

- Extensive surveying and earthworks by the Queensland Main Road Commission.
- Extending the tram service along Compo Road, work conducted by the Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Main Road Commission.
- Upgrading of water supply and electricity services, including the establishment of two new substations by the Brisbane City Council.
- Construction of approximately 80 buildings. Private contractors and the Civil Construction Corps completed this work.
- Production of the tools, gauges, presses and other engineering machinery needed for gun cartridge making. The Queensland Railway Workshops and prominent Queensland engineering firms assisted in this area of expertise.

As preparation of the site progressed, Department of Munitions officers sought financial approval for expenditure of over £1.6 million on stores, raw materials, plant, machinery, equipment and installation work.

JD O'Shea of the Ammunition Factory at Footscray in Victoria was appointed manager of the Rocklea Works on 1 January 1941. Other staff, notably engineers, came from Victorian munitions establishments and private industry. Technical staff were recruited in Queensland. JB Affleck was Chief Accountant. Special training in Melbourne was provided for twelve appointed Queensland accountants. The factory's business administrator was RJ Bright. He was assisted by metallurgist GR Donaldson. The assistant manager was FE Allen, formerly of the Colonial Sugar Refinery. Following interviews in February 1941 fourteen toolmakers, twenty-two trade workers, twenty-eight process workers and fifty-six 'female operators' were chosen for six months training in Melbourne.

The Queensland Main Roads Commission commenced the cutting and filling ground work for the first large building on site, the SAA factory building (now 32 Commerce Street, Salisbury), on 10 March 1941. The first production lot of 200,000 rounds of cartridge SA Ball .303 inch Mk VII was submitted for Army inspection in February 1942. Other types of ammunition produced included cartridge SA Revolver .455 inch MK II, cartridge

SA revolver .455 inch Mk VI and cartridge SA revolver .380 inch Mk II. Production units were as follows:

Cartridge SA Ball .303 Inch Mk VII 127,310,520
Cartridge SA Revolver .455 Inch MK II 162,600
Cartridge SA Revolver .455 Inch Mk VI 1,735,200
Cartridge SA Revolver .380 Inch Mk II 8,520,888
Total 137,729,208

In addition the SAA factory reconditioned and repacked American ammunition, some of which had been salvaged from a wreck site. This involved 'rumbling' the ammunition in granulated cork.

The largest building within the Munitions Works was the QF Case Shop, on which foundation work commenced in May 1941. Manufacture of the 25 pounder QF Case Mk II commenced in April 1942. Under the one roof covering 6.25 acres were two cartridge case plants, each plant capable of producing 1 million cases per annum on a one-shift basis.

Although initially planned for the Ipswich Railway Workshops, the manufacture of Shell QF Smoke 25 pounder Mk III was shifted to Rocklea. Production commenced in a small way in July 1943 but was soon wound down. In August 1943 this section of the Works was removed to Rutherford, NSW.

At its peak the Rocklea Munitions Works employed approximately 3,000 people. The larger Footscray factory in Melbourne, by comparison, employed over 9,000. The peak for Rocklea was reached in May 1943 when 926 men and 1,573 women were recorded as engaged in factory work. An additional 500 men and women worked in the associated areas of Army inspection, food services, medical and welfare. Absenteeism was a problem. The reasons blamed for this included the introduction of night shifts, the regimentation of the work, industrial fatigue and lack of proper meals.

From mid-1943, with the threat of invasion removed and less projected demand for munitions, planning commenced for the conversion of the munitions works buildings to the overhaul of aircraft engines. In November 1943 Cabinet approved £385,000 for this task. Munitions equipment was to be removed from buildings by that same month.

Aircraft engine overhaul at the Rocklea works commenced early in 1944. Banks of sound-proofed engine testing stands were constructed at the eastern end of Evans Road. Unfortunately, the demand for aero engine overhaul had by then decreased. A number of the former Munitions Works buildings were then turned over to the military for use as storage facilities.

By the conclusion of the war eighty-two of the buildings within the former Rocklea Munitions Works were occupied by the Department of the Army, the Royal Navy and the Department of Aircraft Production.

Postwar, the former Rocklea facility was viewed as a significant site for future manufacturing and industry. In 1947 the Queensland Government commenced a progressive purchase of the site, commencing with the area north of Evans Road. By 1947 there were fifty-six tenants on the industrial estate occupying 500,000 square feet (46.45 square metres) of floor space with over 700 employees.

Former Cordite Magazine (Building 8A)

Cordite is the name given to a smokeless propellant used in the manufacture of munitions. Cordite Mark 1, first produced in Britain by Sir Frederick Abel in 1891, was composed of 58% nitroglycerine, 37% guncotton and 5% mineral (petroleum) jelly. The addition of nitrocellulose (gun cotton) to nitroglycerine allowed the oxygen-rich and relatively unstable liquid to be formed into a soft paste which could be forced through dies or perforations to form

cords of explosive between 1 mm and 5 mm wide. The mineral jelly lessened erosion in the bore of the armament and improved storage stability.

Australia's first cordite factory was constructed at Maribyrnong in Victoria in 1909. It supplied the nearby Colonial Ammunition Company, contributing to self-sufficiency in the manufacture of ammunition in Australia. With decentralised production, cordite had to be transported then stored in magazines specifically designed to accommodate this material.

Plans for three cordite magazines at Rocklea, Buildings 8A, 8B and 8C, were completed on 2 April 1941. The buildings were kept small to reduce the impact of accidental explosions. Because of the explosive nature of their contents, the magazines were considered a danger area and located apart from other buildings in the complex.

The magazines also were located at a distance from each other and surrounded by an earthen blast mound which would minimise damage in the event of an explosion.

Cleanways constructed of special concrete ran between the magazines and production areas. On these ran special electrically powered rubber-tyred transport vehicles. These prevented the accumulation of electrostatic charges and kept to a minimum the risk of sparks.

One important design feature of the magazine is its wide overhanging eaves and verandahs. These were to assist in the control of temperature and humidity. Such conditions were necessary as cordite, when kept in moderately high temperatures, over time shows signs of decomposition.

In August 1942 plans were completed for another three magazines, each to have housed 50 tons of explosives, as well as percussion caps. These magazines were not constructed, the explosives stored instead in an old coal mine at Ebbw Vale between Brisbane and Ipswich.

Description

The magazine is a brick building with a timber framed hipped roof clad in corrugated iron. It features wide overhanging eaves.

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 one of the buildings of the former Rocklea Munitions Works.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

As one of the buildings within the only Munitions Works established in Queensland during World War II and as the only remaining of three cordite magazines constructed

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a good example of a cordite magazine building utilised in World War II as part of the larger Rocklea Munitions Factory.

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 a building within an industrial site that at its peak employed up to 3,000 workers each day.

References

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 14. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J56/11; QL686 Part 2; Rocklea Munitions – acquisition of site Part 2
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 21. Trotter, Robin and Colin Mercer, Historical study: Cannon Hill Saleyards
 22. Ross, A. T. *Armed and ready: The industrial development and defence of Australia 1900-1945*. Sydney: Turnton & Armstrong, 1995
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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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