

Heritage Citation



Rocklea Munitions Works - Oil Store and Lead Press (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 9 Chrome Street, Salisbury, Queensland 4107
Type of place	Defence site
Period	World War II 1939-1945
Lot plan	L2_RP187092
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2005 Date of Citation — August 2009
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron
People/associations	Civil Construction Corp (Builder); Department of the Interior Works and Services Branch (Architect)

Criterion for listing

(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific; (D) Representative

This Oil Store building and the Lead Press building were constructed in 1941. Both were important components of the most northerly munitions works complex constructed in Australia in World War II – the Rocklea Munitions Works. The Oil Store housed, in a safe environment, the lubricants required for the machinery used by Brisbane war workers to produce ammunition for the Australian forces and to recondition aero engines for the locally based US 5th Air Force. The Lead Press manufactured the heads of .303 bullets that were the primary focus of this Munitions Works from 1941-43.

History

Prior to the Second World War, although suburban development was slowly occurring in Rocklea, the predominant land usage was primary production. South of Compo Road (renamed post war as Evans 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 government 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.

By the late 1930's, as the likelihood of war became more apparent, the Minister of Defence announced a rearmament program. This first period of expansion from December 1938 focused on the southern States where both raw materials and labour were in close proximity. In June 1940, a second round of munitions factory building commenced. A new Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) factory was constructed at Hendon, South Australia, and a cartridge case factory at Finsbury, also in South Australia.

At the start of 1941, the Commonwealth announced that an initial £1,500,000 would be spent in the construction of a Small Arms Ammunition factory at Rocklea. The Commonwealth Director-General of Munitions (and BHP Director) 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 and existing roads and the Salisbury tramline serviced it. The Rocklea site could be quickly developed with rail, electricity, and water and gas services. It was accessible to Brisbane's urban areas from which a workforce could be drawn.

From February 1941, the Works and Services Branch of the Department of the Interior prepared the plans needed for the Rocklea Munitions Works. 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 Queensland Main Roads Commission commenced the cutting and filling groundwork for the first large building on site, the SAA factory building (now 32 Commerce Street, Salisbury), on 10 March 1941. As preparation of the Rocklea site progressed, The Department of Munitions officers sought financial approval for expenditure of over £1.6 million on stores, raw materials, plant, machinery,

equipment and installation work. Stores would have included the provision for an Oil Store building.

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. Many technicians were recruited from within Queensland. Following local interviews in February 1941, 14 toolmakers, 22 trade workers, 28 process workers and 56 'female operators' were chosen for six months advanced training in Melbourne. JB Affleck was Chief Accountant. Special training in Melbourne was provided for twelve appointed Queensland accountants. The factory's business administrator was RJ Bright. Metallurgist GR Donaldson assisted him. The assistant manager was FE Allen, formerly of the Colonial Sugar Refinery.

The cost of completing the buildings, works, services, air raid shelters and camouflage at the Rocklea Munitions Works amounted to £989,288. It "was one of the largest industrial complexes erected in Queensland during World War II."¹ The establishment of the RMW had been a major undertaking for the Queensland Government and the Brisbane City Council undertaken during a period of wartime labour and equipment shortages. It had involved extensive surveying and earthworks by the Queensland Main Road Commission. The Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Main Road Commission had extended the tram service along Compo Road. The Brisbane City Council had upgraded the water supply and electricity services to Rocklea. This work had included the establishment of two new BCC substations. Approximately 80 buildings, sheds and other structures (guard huts, air raid shelters, railway sidings, a railway bridge over Rocky Water Holes Creek) had to be constructed for the RMW complex, with the Civil Construction Corps and private contractors undertaking this task. The Queensland Railway Workshops at Ipswich and prominent Queensland engineering firms manufactured the tools, gauges, presses and other specialist engineering machinery needed for gun cartridge making at the RMW.

The Small Arms Ammunition factory at Rocklea commenced operations in November 1941, ten months after the site was chosen. The outbreak of the Pacific War on 8 December 1941, prompted the Rocklea Munitions Works to enter full production. The first production lot of 200,000 rounds of cartridge SA Ball .303 inch Mk VII was submitted for Army inspection in February 1942. The capacity of the RMW was expected to reach the production 220 million rounds of small-arms ammunition in a full year.² 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 artillery shells. The .303 round was standard ammunition for the Lee Enfield SMLE rifle, the Bren light machine gun (LMG) and the water-cooled Vickers heavy machine gun (HMG) used by the Australian Army and also by the Royal Australian Air Force. The 25-pounder field gun had become the standard artillery weapon used by the Australian Army, with an Australian cut-down version of this field gun having been adapted for use in the Papua New Guinea jungle.

On 30 March 1942, the Allied Joint Chiefs of Staff had created a new command structure for conducting the Pacific War. Australia became part of the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) Command under US General Douglas MacArthur, with his headquarters (HQ) in Melbourne. In order to be closer to the Papua New Guinea frontline, MacArthur transferred his headquarters to Brisbane on 20 July 1942. This made Brisbane a major garrison and headquarters city, similar in importance to Bombay, India (South East Asia Command HQ) and Pearl harbour, Hawaii (Central Pacific Command HQ). The importance of the RMW had correspondingly increased, as it was closest Australian ammunition manufacturing plant to the frontline at a time when the majority of MacArthur's troops were drawn from the Australian Army.

Although initially planned for the Ipswich Railway Workshops, the manufacture of artillery ammunition Shell QF Smoke 25 pounder Mk III was shifted to the RMW. Smoke shells were important as they were used to mark a target for an artillery battery or to mask an attack or retreat. Production of these types of artillery rounds commenced in a small way in July 1943 but was soon wound down. In August 1943, this section of the RMW

was removed to Rutherford, NSW. Other types of ammunition were produced at the RMW. These 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 RMW 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.

At its peak, the Rocklea Munitions Works employed approximately 3,000 people. By comparison, the larger Footscray factory in Melbourne had over 9,000 staff. The RMW staffing peak occurred in May 1943 when 926 men and 1,573 women were recorded as engaged in factory duties. 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. Fatigue came from the work being arduous, dangerous and often tedious. As the war neared its end, staff morale began to be affected by the RMW workers' concern about their post war employment prospects. This was especially the case with the women workers who faced the prospect of a return to the pre war restrictions on the employment of married women.

From mid-1943, with the threat of Japanese invasion averted there was less than the projected demand for munitions. The last munitions production at the RMW occurred in October 1943. Planning had already commenced for the conversion of the munitions works buildings for the new purpose to the overhaul of aircraft engines. The Curtin Government wished to keep the RMW in operation as the Commonwealth had a decentralisation policy "of assisting the less populated states and country areas."³ The Department of Aircraft Production conducted the conversion of the RMW. In November 1943, Cabinet approved £385,000 for this task. Munitions equipment was to be removed from buildings by that same month. The RMW particularly undertook engine overhauls for the 5th United States Army Air Force (USAAF). As the official history noted

"The Rocklea conversion was the largest undertaken on behalf of the Americans [amongst Australian plants] in the aircraft maintenance field. General Motors-Holden's and Ford combined to transform the small arms factory in a manner suitable for engine overhaul., and a special test centre was built outside the metropolitan area. The large number of workers moved into the area made necessary the construction of special hostels and canteen facilities, and a bus service was provided the Maintenance Division of the Department of Aircraft Production."⁴

RMW not only contributed to the war effort through its munitions production and aircraft engine maintenance work but it also assisted in reducing Australia's war debt by providing aid to the USA through Reciprocal Lend Lease (R.L.L.).

By 1944, 25% of Australia's aircraft industry was devoted to maintenance work for American aircraft.⁵ Aircraft engine overhaul at the Rocklea works commenced early in 1944. Banks of soundproofed engine testing stands were constructed at the eastern end of Evans Road. In April 1944, the US forces moved their headquarters to its

new base at Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea. From that time the war moved further away from Australia, as Macarthur followed his strategy of liberating the Philippines. As a result, the demand for USAAF aero engine overhaul gradually decreased. A number of the former Rocklea Munitions Works buildings were then turned over to the military for use as storage facilities. By the conclusion of the war in September 1945, 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.

Post war, 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.

The Rocklea Munitions Works complex was a major boost to Brisbane's post-war industrial development. Its construction, along with other World War Two buildings elsewhere in Brisbane, provided the city with the facilities to shrug off its pre-war focus on providing support facilities for Queensland's primary industries. The RMW immediately altered the character of the surrounding semi-rural suburbs.

“The quiet farming orientated pattern of development for Salisbury was shattered by drastic light and heavy industrial development provoked by World War II. Evans Road developed into munitions factories during the war and after peace was declared, with the aid of the State Government, industrial development surged ahead. The suburbs surrounding Moorooka and Salisbury became increasingly residential to house the workforce needed in the industrial complex.”⁶

The Oil Store and Lead Press (former) at 9 Chrome Street

Also known as a Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) Store, this type of building (the Oil Store) would have one of the first to be constructed on the Rocklea Munitions Works site. The Lead Press was completed around the same time. A John Oxley Library photograph shows the small Oil Store and Lead Press buildings had been completed by July or August 1941. Both buildings originally had a front entrance accessed through an elevated porch with a separate skillion roof.

The Oil Store building would have had to be completed in the early stages of the construction of the Rocklea Munitions Works site as a safety measure. A safe storage place was required for the combustible chemicals needed to keep both the large SAA Case and Assembly Shop located on the northern side of Compo Road and the large Case Factory and Machine Shop located on the southern side of Compo Road, in 24-hour operation.

To ensure that the building was made as fire-proof as possible, the Oil Store was constructed of brick with a corrugated iron roof. The RMW Fire Warden's Post was located immediately across the roadway (now Chrome Street) from the Oil Store.

The Oil Store building serviced the entire Rocklea Munitions Work. It was strategically located next to the RMW Main Store building that housed the non-combustible items (such as machinery parts) required for the continuous production of ammunition and, later the repair of aircraft engines.

The Lead Press was another building completed in the initial construction stage for the RMW. It produced the lead tips (or heads) required to complete each .303 ammunition round manufactured at this Munitions Works. This component was essential for the final assembly of each round completed at the RMW. The lead tips were mass produced through a metal press in the Lead Press building and then transported the short distance up the roadway (now Chrome Street) to the nearby S.A.A. Case and Assembly Shop building where the tips were fitted to each brass .303 cartridge.

The Lead Press was a simple timber structure with a corrugated iron roof and therefore very easy and quick to construct. The Lead Press building encompassed a floor space of 3,610 square feet.

Post war, both buildings remained Commonwealth Government property until 1951. On 21 March 1951, the site was transferred to the Minister of Industries Assistance of the Queensland Government. This state government department had its name changed to Industrial Development of Queensland. Government ownership (both Federal and State) of the property lasted 32 years and came to an end when this property was sold to Colin Roy Acton and Ronald James Acton on 8 May 1974. The Oil Store has had an additions attached to the rear of the building, while the front entry porch has been removed. The Lead Press has also had some post-war alterations including the enclosing of the entrance porch. The property was transferred to the sole ownership of Colin Acton on 25 November 1981. It is leased to commercial businesses such as the firm of Commercial Alloys.

Both buildings were heritage-listed by the Brisbane City Council on 1 January 2005. As part of the public consultation process, each building was the subject of a site inspection by Council officers in January 2004. The buildings were also presented to Council's independent heritage consultative body, the Heritage Advisory Committee, to confirm the buildings' suitability for entry onto the City Plan Heritage Register.

The entire Rocklea Munitions Works site has been identified as being of local heritage significance in a number of publications. It was detailed in Peter Dunn's *Australia@War* website that was created in 1996. In 2000, it was mentioned in the book *A Closer Look at Salisbury and Nathan Heights*. It was also featured in the *Salisbury Heritage Trails – Residential and Industrial* in 2001. Of the over 80 buildings and other structures constructed for the Rocklea Munitions Works from 1941-43, only thirteen remain. Most recently (February 2008), RMW Inspection Building (former) was totally destroyed by fire. The former RMW Oil Store and Lead press buildings are in situ and are important as two of the surviving buildings of the northern most munitions complex constructed in Australia during the Second World War.

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 two of the remaining support/storage buildings of the Rocklea Munitions Works that was most northerly Australian munitions factory built during World War II; and later, was to play a central part Brisbane's post war industrial development.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as the sole Oil Store and Lead Press buildings to service the only munitions complex built in Brisbane in World War Two.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

as a wartime oil store that played an essential part in servicing the machinery of the Rocklea Munitions Works and as a Lead Press that produced a vital component of .303 rounds manufactured on site.

Representative

CRITERION D

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

as a purpose-built Australian World War II Oil Store and Lead Press building site.

References

1. Coopers Plains Local History Group, *A Closer Look at Salisbury and Nathan Heights*, p. 119
2. Butlin & Schedvin, *War Economy 1942 – 1945*, p. 59
3. Butlin & Schedvin, *War Economy 1942 – 1945*, p. 399
4. Butlin & Schedvin, *War Economy 1942 – 1945*, p. 415
5. Edmonds, Leigh, 'Using new tools: some thoughts about the manufacture of aeroplanes in Australia during the second world war'. Australian war Memorial History Conference 9-13 July 1990
6. Roberts, Beryl, *A Brief History of Salisbury*, (Brisbane: Coopers Plain Ward Bicentennial History Committee, 1988), pp 16-17
7. A & B Journal of Queensland, February 1941, April 1941, September 1941, October 1941
8. Australian Heritage Database, ADI Footscray, Gordon Street, Footscray, Vic
9. Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Detail Plans Map No. 1661
10. Byrnes, Matthew (ed.) *Wartime recollections*. Brisbane: Australia Remembers 1945-1995 Moreton Commemorative Committee, 1995
11. Butlin S.J, & Schedvin C. B., *War Economy 1942-1945 – Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series 4 (Civil), Volume IV*, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1976)
12. Coopers Plains Local History Group, *A closer look at Salisbury and Nathan Heights*, Brisbane: CPLHG, 2000
13. Coopers Plains Local History Group, *Salisbury Heritage Trails – Residential and Industrial*, (Brisbane: CPLHG, 2001)
14. Edmonds, Leigh, 'Using new tools: some thoughts about the manufacture of aeroplanes in Australia during the second world war'. Australian war Memorial History Conference 9-13 July 1990
15. John Oxley Library, photographic collection.
16. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J56/11; QL686 Part 1; Rocklea Munitions – acquisition of site Part 1
17. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J56/11; QL686 Part 1B; Rocklea Munitions – acquisition of site Part 1B
18. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J56/11; QL686 Part 2; Rocklea Munitions – acquisition of site Part 2
19. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J56/11; QL686 Part 3; Rocklea Munitions – acquisition of site Part 3
20. National Australian Archives (Queensland) J2682; W6186 to QS3128; Register of architectural plans and sketch plans, single number
21. National Australian Archives (Victoria), Series MP438/3/0; S/43; History of the Ammunition Factory Rocklea Queensland
22. Queensland Main Roads Commission, *A history of the Queensland Main Roads during World War Two 1939-1945*
23. Trotter, Robin and Colin Mercer, Historical study: Cannon Hill Saleyards
24. Queensland Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning, Joint Ventures Management

Group, 1995

25. Roberts, Beryl, *A Brief History of Salisbury*, (Brisbane: Coopers Plains Ward Bicentennial History Committee, 1988)
 26. Ross, A. T. *Armed and ready: The industrial development and defence of Australia 1900-1945*. Sydney: Turnton & Armstrong, 1995
 27. <http://home.st.net.au/~dunn/ozatwar/ammofactory.htm>
-

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised June 2022)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane