

Heritage Citation



Serbian Orthodox Church of St Nicholas

Key details

Addresses	At 48 Bandara Street, Richlands, Queensland 4077
Type of place	Church
Period	Late 20th Century 1960-1999
Lot plan	L168_RP86573
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 29 November 2019 Date of Citation — June 2017
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social

The Serbian Orthodox Church was completed in 1976 for the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Congregation “Sveti Nikola” (Saint Nicholas). The Congregation was established in 1968 after the purchase of the 2.5 acre

block fronting Bandara Street, Richlands. A priest's residence (1980) and two community halls (1979 and circa 2000) were later added to the site.

On 24 April 2016, a memorial dedicated to the fallen soldiers of Serbia and the ANZAC nations (Australia and New Zealand) was officially opened. The halls, war memorial and priest's residence are excluded from the heritage listing.

History

The Serbian Orthodox Church opened in Bandara Street, Richlands in 1976, several years after the site was purchased in 1968.

The Serbian Orthodox church has had a relatively short presence in Brisbane with the first wave of post-war Serbian migrants arriving circa 1948. A church/school community was established in Brisbane in 1953 and registered as The Serbian Orthodox Ecclesiastical School Community of St Nikolas – Queensland in 1955. The community purchased land in Bayliss Street, Toowong, where a hall was constructed. The new hall opened on 3 May 1959 and was used for church services, schooling and social functions such as folkloric dancing.

In 1963, a schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church abroad had ramifications for the nascent church community in Brisbane causing a split in the Toowong based congregation. As a result, three separate groups formed and established their own churches. In 1968, the Serbian Orthodox Church-School congregation of Seta Nikola was established at Wacol and a 2.5 acre block of land fronting Bandara Street was purchased. A second Serbian Orthodox Church, also named for Saint Nicholas, was founded in a former Methodist Church in Ross Street, Woolloongabba, after purchasing the site in 1973. A third congregation purchased the former Congregational Church at Vulture Street, South Brisbane. This church was extended in the Serbian Orthodox style and named the St Nicholas Free Serbian Orthodox Church.

Due to the presence of the immigration centre in the former Wacol Army Barracks after World War II, this area of Brisbane became home to many migrants during the post war period. Three members of the new Wacol/Richlands Serbian Orthodox congregation mortgaged their homes to finance the purchase of the Bandara Street land. The first church service was held at the new site under a tent, led by Father Dragan Petkovic from Adelaide. The new congregation grew quickly, allowing the loan to be repaid. Plans began for the construction of a church under the supervision of Milan Bogdanovic, a civil engineer. Brisbane City Council approval for a "recreation shed" on the site was given in 1970, followed by approval in 1974 for a church and priest's residence at an estimated combined cost of \$60,000.

In 1976, the new church was opened and blessed by Bishop Dimitrije Balac. Milan Bogdanovic was pronounced the Kum, or Godfather, of the church. The old recreation shed was demolished and approval sought for construction of a new hall in 1979. This hall was built behind the church and has since been extended several times. The residence for the priest was completed in the south eastern corner of the block on the Bandara Street boundary circa 1980. Construction of the buildings was carried out gradually as the church community raised funds for ongoing work. Members of the community also donated their labour. The names of those who laid the foundations of the church are preserved underneath the church.

Major extensions to the hall were done during the 1990s to accommodate the growing congregation. At this time,

the existing congregation was supplemented by Serbians arriving in Brisbane seeking refuge from the conflict caused by the disintegration of Yugoslavia. With an established Serbian community already in the Richlands area, many Serbian families chose to settle in the locality ensuring valuable social and cultural connections. By 1992, the rift between the three Brisbane Serbian Orthodox churches which arose in the 1960s had been resolved.

The Church of Saint Nicholas at Richlands has been constructed in the traditional Eastern Orthodox architectural tradition. Although comparatively simple in design, it includes several of the customary features including the orientation of the sanctuary (behind the altar) to the east, a domed cupola above the entrance to the church, the use of triple arches on the entry and a rendered masonry exterior.

During subsequent decades, the church at Richlands has played a significant spiritual, social, educational and cultural role in the Serbian Orthodox community. The work of the Kolo Srpski Sestara (Circle of Serbian Sisters) has been of particular importance. This group assists with occasions such as feast days and commemorations of significant events in Serbian history and provides support to elderly members of the church and families in need. A second hall, funded again by contributions from the congregation, was built behind the large hall in 2003. This building is used as a “school” which holds language classes for children on Friday afternoon. The large hall has a stage and is used for festivals and other community events. It is also hired by other communities for weddings and other functions.

Description

The structure of the church of St Nicholas, Serbian Orthodox church show it to have its entry to the west and its sanctuary to the east. There is a iconostasis separating the altar from the sanctuary, an arched screen which is covered with painted icons. The painting of religious icons on the walls and ceilings has not yet been completed but preparations are currently underway.

Stairs in the north western corner of the church lead to a small choir which overlooks the interior of the church toward the altar. Behind the choir is a small room which provides access to the ropes for the church bell.

The church contains ornate timber furniture including a single pew against each side of the church providing seating for older members of the congregation and a covered table representing the tomb of Christ. On either side of the entrance are recessed timber shelves for the purposes of placing lit candles.

The church’s orientation with the sanctuary to the east and entrances to the west is derived from an Orthodox tradition dating back to the 11th century. The congregation is therefore directed to face east during services as this is seen as the direction of the rising sun and is associated with His Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming. The orientation of the building is not aligned with the road, which is significant in that it reflects the use rather than the site.

The structure of the church is simplistic by comparison to other orthodox churches in Brisbane, however it is one of the few with continuous and ongoing Serbian community ownership. The built form is of a copper domed cupola above the tiled pyramid roof to the narthex or entrance and simple lower, continuous gable form over the main nave. The sanctuary is semicircular and roofed similarly. The nave is divided into even bays, supported by

rectangular rendered masonry buttresses and the church has windows of various design including arched and circular.

The 2015 Anzac memorial, two halls and priest's residence on the site are not considered to be of local heritage significance.

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 church demonstrates the importance of post war immigration and multiculturalism in the development of the Richlands/Wacol local area and the history of the growth of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Brisbane during the post war period.

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 in Brisbane of an Eastern Orthodox church which displays characteristics of this type including eastern orientation, a painted iconostasis, a domed cupola above the tiled pyramid roof and a semi-circular sanctuary

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

For the simple yet striking traditional design, detailing and use of contrasting materials of the church which give it

an imposing presence in the Bandara streetscape and for the church's highly decorative interior which features traditional religious Eastern Orthodox artwork.

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 Serbian Orthodox Church which has played an important role in serving the social, cultural and spiritual needs of the local Serbian community since 1976.

References

1. Brisbane City Council. Building Card
2. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
3. Queensland War Memorial Register website. Retrieved 8 Dec 2016.
<http://www.qldwarmemorials.com.au/memorial/?id=1396>
4. Information kindly provided by Stevo Vlasisavljevic, President of Church Committee and Father Bojicic, Serbian Orthodox Church, Richlands, 3 April 2017, 23 May 2017
5. "Australian Women Volunteers with the Serbian Army in World War One", Serbian Weekly Newspaper website. 24 August 2016. Retrieved 3 April 2017. <http://srpskiglas.com.au/australian-women-volunteers-with-the-serbian-army-in-world-war-one/?lang=lat>
6. Apperley, Richard and Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guild to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney, 1989

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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.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



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