

## Heritage Citation



### South Brisbane Congregational Church (former)

#### Key details

<b>Also known as</b>	St Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
<b>Addresses</b>	At 245 Vulture Street, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101
<b>Type of place</b>	Church
<b>Period</b>	Interwar 1919-1939
<b>Style</b>	Composite
<b>Lot plan</b>	L7_RP11691; L6_RP11691
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — September 2010
<b>Construction</b>	Walls: Face brick

<b>People/associations</b>	E.W. Hiley (Builder); Thomas Brennan Femester Gargett (Architect)
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<b>Criterion for listing</b>	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical association
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This building was constructed in 1933 for the South Brisbane Congregational Church following the destruction of the previous church in a fire. The Congregational Church endured a number of setbacks in South Brisbane in the early twentieth century including floods and a fire, forcing it to rebuild twice. The unusual octagonal form of the church building was proposed by builder E.W. Hiley and incorporated into the design plan by Brisbane architect T.B.F. Gargett.

The church was very community focused and provided both the interwar timber hall and former manse as a venue for church and community activities. In 1975, the South Brisbane congregation amalgamated with the Mt. Gravatt congregation and the building was sold to the Russian Orthodox Church. The church was renamed the Saint Nicholas Free Serbian Orthodox Church. The addition of the striking towers with their cupolas has added a Russian Orthodox element to the church's original Interwar Gothic design.

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## History

The South Brisbane Congregational Church held its first meeting at the Mechanics Institute in Stanley Street on 9 July 1865. Its first permanent place of worship was in Grey Street, South Brisbane which opened for service on 13 January 1867. The timber building in Grey Street was partially destroyed after the devastating 1893 floods and was dismantled. It was re-erected on this Vulture Street site but was destroyed by fire on 16 October 1931.

The damaged building was sold for removal, and the congregation used the adjacent hall for worship. The following year the church commissioned prominent Brisbane architect T.B.F. Gargett to design a new brick building for the site. The builder, and church historian, Mr E.W. Hiley, apparently suggested the unusual octagonal design. Work commenced in February 1933 and the foundation stones were laid in April. A time capsule containing newspapers, coins and church histories was placed beneath the central foundation stone.

The new church was dedicated for service on 9 September 1933. The fact that the new building was constructed while the nation was still in the midst of the crippling 1930s depression is a testament to the importance of the church to its members. This importance is also reflected in the legacy of £100 by Mrs Annie Baynes and the donation of three stained glass windows by one member, Mrs Wriggles, who offered the windows in memory of her son, husband and three daughters. Several other gifts were also made. Some items of furniture were recovered from the fire and restored for the new church.

Remarkably, in the 1930s the church was still attended by foundation members: in 1936 the church celebrated the 60 year anniversary of Mr E.G. Schlencker as the church organist. The 1945 annual report listed six members with more than 50 years' membership.

The church played an active role in the war effort during the Second World War, and a regular news bulletin was sent to church members who had joined the forces. In 1948 a motion was passed approving of supervised dancing as part, but not all, of social evenings on Church property. This reflects the fact that despite having

several long-term members, the church also had a high membership of young people.

From 1952 the church operated the Eliza Gillies Memorial Kindergarten, which served the local community as well as church members. The post-war baby boom meant such facilities were in short supply in Brisbane in the 1950s.

In 1952 a member of the church, Dorothy Wacker, was accepted as a candidate for the Ministry and subsequently became the first woman to be ordained to the Christian Ministry in Queensland and to the pastoral oversight of the Congregational Church.

In addition to serving the congregation, the South Brisbane Congregational Church and hall provided a meeting place for non-church members within the district. A community centre was established in the 1950s and a film service commenced in 1952. In 1957 a YMCA boys' group started meeting at the church. From 1962, the hall was used by the Queensland Sub-Normal Children's Association during week days, and a social gathering of British immigrants met fortnightly at the hall. Following construction of a new manse in 1965, the church decided to convert the old manse, behind the church into a community centre to serve young people in particular. The Centre included a coffee lounge, reading and study room, a games room, counselling room and caretaker's flat. The former manse is still extant, but is now in private ownership and is used as a family home.

The South Brisbane population has undergone sweeping changes since the Second World War. In the post-war era many of the Anglo/Irish residents moved away and were replaced by European and later Asian migrant families. Prompted by declining attendance, in the 1970s the Congregational community decided to discontinue services at South Brisbane and combine with the Mt Gravatt Congregational Church. In December 1975 the last Congregational service was held at the church, and the building was handed over to its new owners, the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The church was renamed Saint Nicholas Free Serbian Orthodox Church, and two cupolas were added, in the Russian Orthodox tradition. The building continues to serve the Saint Nicholas Free Serbian Orthodox congregation, reflecting the changing nature of South Brisbane's population in the second half of this century.

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## Description

This small church of an unusual octagonal plan form has been made more unusual with the addition of two towers capped with cupolas - forming a striking landmark along Vulture Street which accentuates the multi-cultural identity of this area. While the original windows have sprung arched tops giving the church a nominally Gothic style the octagonal plan form, minimally castellated pediment and the more recently added towers with their cupola tops and arched windows, give this church a singularity outside any particular style. The church is built of red/brown face brickwork with rendered bands and trim around openings.

The entry porch, approached by stairs to each side through sprung arch doorways, has three sprung arch window openings to its front wall and a heavily moulded rendered parapet to three sides. The eight facets of the body of the church have spring arched windows in triplets with the windows of the front face extended higher through the string course as an accentuation of this frontage. This front face is capped with a small gable pediment topped with a cross.

The sides of the building originally had smaller ancillary rooms, the front walls of which stepped up, as parapets, towards the main building. Only one of these remains intact on the left side, the one on the right now forms the base of the shorter of the two towers with a column supported arched entry from the side yard. Apart from the towers added in the 1970s, the replacement of the original front fence, and the painting of the brick parapet, the original external appearance is largely intact.

A large but simple timber and tin highset, Interwar style building exists at the rear of the site, connected to the church. This building's plain form is complex and its function is not clear from the street. A roof lantern exists above the approximate centre of the building which could easily light a hall-type space. Timber windows have been replaced with aluminium windows.

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## 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:

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#### Historical

##### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

As a church which was constructed during the economic depression of the 1930s and adapted to meet the spiritual needs of an increasingly multi-cultural population during the 1970s.

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#### Aesthetic

##### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

For its use of contrasting materials and striking combination of repeated gothic arches and cupola topped towers. The church is a local landmark and makes an imposing visual contribution to Vulture Street.

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## 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 church which served the Congregational community of South Brisbane for forty years before becoming a place of worship for the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 1970s.

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## 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 an ecclesiastical work of prominent Brisbane architect, Thomas Brennan Femester Gargett.

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## References

1. *The Courier Mail*, 5 December 1975
  2. Hiley, W. 1965 *A Century of Witness, 1865-1965: a history of the South Brisbane Congregational Church*, Brisbane: South Brisbane Congregational Church
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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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