

## Heritage Citation



### St George's Greek Orthodox Church

#### Key details

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| <b>Addresses</b>     | At 36 Browning Street, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101                           |
| <b>Type of place</b> | Church   |
| <b>Period</b>        | Postwar 1945-1960  |
| <b>Style</b>         | Mediterranean  |
| <b>Lot plan</b>      | L1_RP200323; L213_B3137  |
| <b>Key dates</b>     | Local Heritage Place Since — 30 November 2012<br>Date of Citation — January 2009 |
| <b>Construction</b>  | Walls: Masonry   |

**People/associations** Ronald Martin Wilson (Architect)

**Criterion for listing** (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social

St. George's Greek Orthodox Church at South Brisbane was built in 1958 during a period of increased Greek migration to Queensland after the Second World War. South Brisbane and West End became home to many Greek immigrants in this period and a new Greek Orthodox Church was deemed essential by the expanding Greek community. Designed by prominent Brisbane architect R. M. Wilson, St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in South Brisbane is a unique octagonal building with a large octagonal dome and opulently decorated interior that follows the Greek Orthodox tradition. Within the grounds is a War Memorial honouring those in the Greek community who gave their lives in war fighting for the Allied Forces in the Second World War.

## History

The Greek community has played an important role in the history of Brisbane since the early twentieth century. The first Greek immigrant to be naturalised in Queensland was Christopher Arsenios in 1869, but it was not until the early twentieth century that a small wave of Greek immigrants made Brisbane their home. By 1915 there were fifty Greek immigrants living in Brisbane, and a total of 400 in Queensland. It was in this period that the Greek community in Brisbane formed the first "Greek Association of Queensland"; their headquarters were in Adelaide Street where the members ran a coffee shop in which they could meet and have discussions.

With the commencement of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913 that involved Greece many sought refuge from the unrest in places such as North America and Australia. This was to be a pattern that occurred at various times in the twentieth century. The interwar era saw another wave of Greek immigration to Queensland due to the outbreak of war between Greece and Turkey in 1921. At a meeting of the Greek Association of Queensland in 1921 it was decided that a Greek Community centre was required due to the increase in Brisbane's Greek population and shortly after a property was purchased in Charlotte Street for this purpose. Consequently, the Greek community were able to hold regular Greek Orthodox Church services at various venues with a permanent priest and also establish a Greek school.

In 1929 Queensland's first Greek Orthodox Church, St. George's, was opened in Charlotte Street. By the 1930s the Greek community had its own newspaper, The Queensland Messenger, and a second Greek community group, the Kytherian Association, a reflection of the success and growth of the community in Brisbane.

Greek immigration numbers in Queensland dropped as a result of the Second World War and it was not until the cessation of the war did it increase again. By the 1950s the Greek community had outgrown the Charlotte Street church and it was deemed necessary for a new, larger centre of worship be built. A large portion of the Greek community resided in the South Brisbane/West End area and this was also where the first Greek Community Centre had been established on Russell Street. It seemed appropriate to build the new church in this vicinity. In 1956 a portion of land was purchased on the corner of Edmondstone and Besant Streets, South Brisbane, for the purpose of erecting a new church.

The church was designed by prominent Brisbane architect R. M. Wilson. Ronald Martin Wilson was a Brisbane

born architect and son of eminent Federation period architect A. B. Wilson. Ronald became chief architectural assistant at his father's firm in 1908 after completing his tertiary education studying Engineering at the University of Queensland. After working for the British Ministry of Munitions during the First World War, he studied Town Planning in London and returned to Brisbane in 1919. He established a firm with his father in 1920 and continued the business subsequent to his father's retirement in 1928. His work includes the Cliffside Flats at Kangaroo Point, Birt & Co. Wharves at Newstead, and the St. Lucia and Ithaca Presbyterian Churches.

In 1956 the plans for the new Greek Orthodox Church were approved by the Archdiocese in Sydney as well as the Brisbane City Council. The ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone was held on 4 May 1958 and attended by several high profile Greek citizens, Government Officials as well as parishioners. With the completion of the church in April 1960, Archbishop Ezekiel officiated the consecration of the church.

St. George's Greek Orthodox Church, South Brisbane has played a central role in many of Brisbane's Greek residents' lives since it opened. Within the Church grounds a war memorial has been erected in memory of members of the Hellenic community in Brisbane who lost their lives fighting for and with the Allied Forces. Erected by the Hellenic sub-branch of the R.S.L South East District it was unveiled in 1995 by the then Honourable Con Sciacca M.P, Minister for Veteran Affairs and Wing Commander, and Alex Freeleagus, Honorary Consul General of Greece in Queensland and esteemed RAAF war veteran. The plaque reads: "The Memorial Commemorates the Sacrifice of all Those of Hellenic Heritage who Served the Allied Cause in Defence of Democracy." The memorial is a reminder of the sacrifices made by many of the Greek community for Australia.

St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in South Brisbane retains its importance for Brisbane's Greek community. As a centre for worship, community and social activity the church plays a continuing role in the lives of many of Brisbane's residents. The church is situated opposite Musgrave Park and dominates the Edmondstone Street streetscape and as such is a local landmark.

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## Description

The church was designed to reflect Greek Orthodox tradition with a central octagonal dome surrounded by structures at four points of the compass in a cruciform shape. The design has Mediterranean influences including external face brick walls with bands of white coloured render to the upper sections. The southern entrance porch incorporates a large round arch and windows with smaller round arched openings punctuate the upper and lower walls of the building. The altar is contained within a semi-circular/bay on the eastern side. The interior of the church has been opulently adorned with traditional Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical frescos.

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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 St. George's Greek Orthodox Church, South Brisbane is important in demonstrating the pattern of Greek migration and settlement in Postwar Brisbane and the role of the Brisbane Greek Community in meeting the spiritual needs of their Orthodox Christian parishioners.

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## Rarity

### CRITERION B

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

St. George's Church demonstrates uncommon external and internal architecture and decoration associated with Greek Orthodox religious practice and traditions in a Brisbane (and Queensland) context; the Hellenic War Memorial is a rare reminder of the contribution made by those with Hellenic heritage who served in the Allied armed services.

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## Representative

### CRITERION D

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

as a major congregational centre for Brisbane's Greek community since 1958 that displays the traditional interior design style of the Greek Orthodox Church including opulent ecclesiastical frescoes.

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## Aesthetic

### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

the church is an unusual octagonal brick building with a domed roof that contributes to the streetscape of this area of South Brisbane and is valued not only by the Greek parishioners but also by the broader Brisbane community; the interior of the church is opulently adorned with traditional Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical frescoes

and as such holds aesthetic significance for Brisbane.

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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

this place has a special association with the important Greek migrant community in Brisbane that developed during the twentieth century. In particular, this church stands testament to the strong sense of identity and cooperation exhibited by the Greek Community of Brisbane; the war memorial within the grounds honours those of Hellenic heritage who served with the Allied Forces in the Second World War.

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## References

1. DERM Cultural Heritage Citation, "Saint Theodores Greek Orthodox Church", CHIMS
2. *Greek Orthodox Community of St. George*, [www.gocstgeorge.com.au](http://www.gocstgeorge.com.au)
3. "Wilson, Ronald Martin", Australian Dictionary of Biography
4. Historic Titles, Department of Environment and Resource Management
5. Queensland Post Office Directories
6. Brisbane City Council New Building Register
7. *The Brisbane Courier*, Friday 19 October 1928, p16
8. *The Courier Mail*, Saturday 27 March 1943, p4
9. The Brisbane Courier, Monday 24 December 1928, p15
10. R. M. Wilson, *Building Specifications*, Greek Community of St. George 'Erection of a brick church at the corner of Edmond stone & Besants Sts, South Brisbane, 1958, Fryer Library Collection, University of Queensland
11. R. M. Wilson, *Electrical Installation*, Church of the Greek Orthodox Community of St. George, South Brisbane, 1957, Fryer Library Collection, University of Queensland

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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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