

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE COMMISSARIAT

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When the first settlement moved from Redcliffe in 1824 the party chose as the administrative centre for the settlement a river-side strip extending from the present Law Courts, on North Quay, to the Parliamentary Annexe, at Alice Street. The Commandant's Cottage was built on land later occupied by the Government Printing Office, and, almost exactly opposite, on the river bank below the level of William Street, was built the Commissariat Store.

A photograph, probably taken in the 1880s, shows the Commissariat Store fully built with several sheds in front of it on the water's edge. It shows the main road from the front (river side) of the Commissariat Store going up the hill in a westerly direction to join William Street.

The precise period over which it was built is still the subject of doubt. It is thought that the ground floor was commenced about the end of 1824 but because of the Royal cipher and the date "1829" above the door, 1829 is the date ascribed to its completion. After the Windmill it is the oldest existing building in the State.

From the report of the subsequent official inquiry it is known that on 27 September 1828 the foundation trench work was being excavated because, on that day, John Brungar, one of the gang of convicts then working on the foundations, attacked another convict working here, William Perfoot. (Perfoot died from the attack and Brungar was convicted in Sydney and hanged for his murder) Captain Patrick Logan was the Commandant between 1825 and 1830 and it is thought that his requirement for speedy construction of government buildings was the reason the store was completed in 1829, called by him a "magazine".

It can be seen that the foundations and the walls up to the top storey are built of dressed Brisbane tuff, a volcanic ash stone which is also known as "porphyry". The corner-stones, pillars, sills and lintels are of sandstone. In 1828 the Kangaroo Point Quarries were in operation and stone was carried across the river by punt. In the course of major renovations in 1913 the top storey was added, constructed of cement-rendered brick, and a new main entrance was constructed, but facing away from the river to allow access from William Street. The roof was originally of wooden shingles and later of corrugated iron, but in the 1913 restoration the building this was probably replaced with corrugated iron. A further restoration was carried out over the

period of 1978-1980 when the cement supports and the stairs, which can be seen on the ground floor, were constructed. At this time a previously unknown drainage system of brick and stone, obviously contemporaneous with original construction, was discovered under the ground floor.

The purposes to which the building have been put are numerous. Initially, of course, it was an Army store. A plan, dated 1838, shows the southeastern end of the first floor as being in use as an Engineers' Store, and the northeastern end as a Clothing Store. The centre section is marked on the plan as "Commissariat", which is taken to mean a store room for general supply. After the end of the period of army control in the colony and until separation in 1859 it was used as a civilian "Colonial Store". It served as the colony's first bonded store until Customs House was opened at Petrie Bight in 1846.

In the 1850s, and again in the 1870s and 1880s, during periods of high immigration, part of the Store was used to accommodate overflowing streams of migrants while better accommodation was being built for them. Apparently, it had brief use as a lockup and police barracks at about the time of separation. It reverted solely to storage use from 1865. In the "Blood or Bread" riots caused by the financial crisis in 1866 the store-filled building was the centre of angry attention from rioters when they marched down William Street and damaged the doors by pelting large stones. In this century it has had numerous uses, including a base for the Boy Scouts at one stage. Until 1965 it was occupied temporarily by Queensland State Archives and later by other State instrumentalities.

The building is often referred to as the "Old" Commissariat Store but it seems more accurate that the long barn-like wooden building between Elizabeth and George Streets, which served as the original store, should have that description. This building should just be called the "Commissariat Store".

In 1981, after restoration, possession was handed over by the Queensland Government to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland for its headquarters, by a lease from year to year.

The Society is pleased and proud to be based in the "Commissariat Store" and nothing could be more fitting than that this venerable structure be the home of the Society and the venue for its major conferences.

SOURCES

1. RHSQ Pamphlet.
2. Discussion with Dr. Drury Clarke F.R.Hist. on 9 August, 1990.
3. R. Gibbins, "Ten Brisbane Historic Buildings", University of Queensland, Architecture Thesis, 1956, reprinted in J.S. Steele, *Brisbane Town in Convict Days 1824-1842*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1975, p.119.