

Brisbane: whither art thou?

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During the 1920s and 1930s Queenslanders were active participants in the world-wide interest in town planning. Town planners and others were actively engaged in discussion and promotion of a range of town planning initiatives for the betterment of the urban environment. Prominent among these were proposals for a cultural precinct in Wickham Park, Brisbane and a government offices embankment beautification scheme for William Street and adjacent riverside. Both schemes were Queensland government initiatives designed by Raymond Nowland, architect with the Department of Public Works. The schemes excited public debate and the cultural precinct in Wickham Park was almost realised. Site works for a proposed State Library of Queensland commenced in the late 1930s but work was halted with the outbreak of World War II. These schemes remain as a tantalising archive of a Brisbane townscape that may have been.



1. Brisbane 1888 (JOL an7878644nla)



State Library of Queensland
John Deasy Library

2. Queen's Wharf Rd Brisbane c.1911 (JOL38565)



State Library of Queensland
John Deasy Library

3. Aerial George St Brisbane 1923 (JOL55411p)



4. Brisbane Riverside Expressway (National Archives of Australia A6135)

Rossi proposes that the concept of the city is not reducible to a single basic idea but that the city is the sum of many diverse parts. Each city can be distinguished from other cities by its unique history, geographical location, climate and lifestyle. These provide a city with its own individual character.¹ This paper looks briefly at one aspect of the diverse makeup of a city – its public architecture. The public sector has a role to play in the development of a city. It has a responsibility to contribute to urban design through the development of policies and guidelines and its public architecture must engage with the city so as to contribute to the urban character, mindful of the visual power of public buildings. Symbolic of the aspirations of their era, government buildings have a particular role in the dynamic presentation of the city.²

Public buildings in Brisbane

Over its relatively short history, Brisbane has changed many times. It has been transformed from tiny settlement to town to city. During this rapid development, the face and character of the city has altered.

Colonial governments saw the establishment of 'civilisation' through public architecture as a primary responsibility of a government in a colony. Further, public buildings in a capital city defined its particular role as the seat of government within the colony. Brisbane, as the capital city of Queensland, is the seat of the state government and accommodates the activities of government and the bureaucracy that supports it. Through their building

¹ Aldo Rossi, *The architecture of the city*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Oppositions Books, MIT Press, 1982.

² Rossi, *The architecture of the city*, p. 115.

programs, successive state governments have sought to reflect Brisbane's status as an impressive state capital.

Prior to free settlement of Brisbane, land along William and George streets was reserved for government purposes.³ From 1825, a row of modest official buildings was established at North Quay, along what is now William Street.⁴ Government House (1862) and Parliament House (1867) were established at the east end of this row, with Parliament House fronting Alice Street and terminating George Street and Government House standing in the Domain to the east and approached by a carriageway from George Street. The executive and administrative buildings were sited in the blocks fronting William and George streets and the Supreme Court, fronting George Street, terminated the western end of the government precinct. Queen Street became the principal commercial street and crossed the government row at George Street. This junction of George and Queen streets together with successive Victoria Bridges became the southern entrance to the city of Brisbane.

Early governments in Queensland continued an ambitious building program in Brisbane including the erection of public buildings which Sinnamon considers to be of 'remarkable quality and civic scale' along the designated government row.⁵ The quality of the construction, the careful siting and the substantial nature of the architecture in the most prominent buildings in the government row (in particular Parliament House, Land Administration Building and Treasury Building) were part of a building program undertaken with great confidence in and expectation of the future prosperity of the colony.

Town Planning

A general enthusiasm for town planning prevailed in Britain (and her Empire), Europe and the United States of America at the start of the twentieth century. There was a concern to shape and improve the environment of the city with an emphasis on the orderly arrangement of the various parts of a city and the creation of an efficient circulation system. The issues of particular interest to town planners included establishing optimum lot sizes and building spaces, establishing appropriate building heights, providing adequate green spaces and maximising the effects of sunlight for warmth and natural lighting. 1909 was a milestone year for the movement: the first town planning act in Britain was passed, the United States held its first national conference on city planning and Daniel Burnham's plan for Chicago was

³ First surveyors arrived in Brisbane in May 1839 to undertake a survey so that land could be offered for sale by the government when the area was opened to free settlement in 1842. Bill Kitson and Judith McKay, *Surveying Queensland 1839-1945: a pictorial history*, Brisbane, Department of Natural Resources and Water and Queensland Museum, 2006, pp. 15-17.

⁴ R Fisher, *Brisbane timeline: from Captain Cook to CityCat*, Brisbane, Brisbane History Group, 1999, p. 5.

⁵ Ian Sinnamon, 'Let's sell grandma and make ourselves a fast buck', *National Trust Queensland Journal*, August 1992, p.11.

published.⁶ The first international conference of Town Planning was held in London in October 1910 at which John Sulman presented a paper on the new Australian capital (Canberra). The International Garden Cities & Town Planning Association was formed in 1914.⁷

Queensland architect Raymond Nowland (1894–1973) shared this enthusiasm and actively participated in the town planning movement. He presented public lectures, was often called on for comments in the newspapers, was an active member of the Town Planning Association of Queensland, produced a number of town, suburban and city civic planning schemes and lectured in Town Planning for the University of Queensland. He applied and was runner-up for the position of the first town planner of the Greater Brisbane Council in 1925.⁸ He designed and contributed to a number of city beautification schemes proposed for Brisbane during the 1920s and 1930s.

Developing a civic vision for Brisbane

An active member of the town planning movement, a world-wide movement that crusaded for improved physical and aesthetic standards for the organisation and architecture of cities and towns, Nowland brought Brisbane into this international campaign through his advocacy for the establishment of a long term plan for the development of Brisbane to be implemented prudently in manageable stages. Glimpses of a Brisbane that might have been are evident in his lectures and the unbuilt projects he designed for Turbot and William Streets, Brisbane.

At a meeting of the Town Planning Association in November 1925, Nowland supported calls for a board to be formed by the Brisbane City Council to consider formulating suitable guidelines to regulate building heights, setbacks and street frontages.⁹ At a meeting of the association in September 1927, he supported the preservation of the amenity of public park reserves and allowing discrete fencing of designated areas for recreational activities.¹⁰

Traffic congestion within the city of Brisbane was a concern as the population grew and the level of commercial activity increased. The Cross River Commission had been established by the Brisbane City Council to study and report on options for crossing the Brisbane River and for relieving traffic congestion within the city. Nowland, together with town planner Mr RA McInnis, reported on these investigations by the Commission to the Town Planning Association of Queensland. This thorough report by Nowland/McInnis was published in *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland* with their own recommendations for addressing the traffic problems.¹¹ In this report they indicated a concern for adequate long

⁶ *The new encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1997, vol. 16 pp. 429-430.

⁷ Robert Home, *Of planting and planning*, London, E&FN Spon, 1997, p. 141.

⁸ *The Architectural & Building Journal of Queensland (ABJQ)*, 10 October 1925, p. 54.

⁹ *ABJQ*, 10 November 1925, p. 41.

¹⁰ *ABJQ*, 10 October 1927, p. 27.

¹¹ RC Nowland and RA McInnis, 'The cross river problem', *ABJQ*, 10 June 1926, pp. 20-30.

term planning suggesting that ‘a scheme which allows of progressive expenditure in such a way that all new works, though merely parts of the whole scheme, are themselves immediate improvements, ... is preferable to a huge undertaking, which must be carried out as a whole to obtain these results.’¹² The planning schemes proposed by Nowland for Turbot and William Streets incorporate the ability to build in stages in order to achieve a scheme that is suitable for expanded future needs.

Development and beautification of North Quay and William Street, Brisbane

Members of the Town Planning Association were involved with planning proposals and discussions for this part of the city of Brisbane for a number of years. In 1924, Nowland delivered a lecture concerning the ‘rearrangement of traffic facilities at North Quay’ in which he discussed a scheme that he submitted to the Civic Survey Committee.¹³ In 1925, an interview was published in *The Sunday Mail* detailing his views on town planning in Brisbane. He spoke of the need for preserving the beauty of the skyline; the value of establishing architectural vistas so that the finer buildings might be seen to advantage; the drawing up of regulations in relation to building heights and designs; a proposal to widen Adelaide Street between Albert and Edward Streets so as to establish ‘beautiful architectural groupings ... which would have made the street a delight to the eye’ and produce ‘a most attractive approach to Brisbane’s principal civic square’; and the need for planning of a suitable approach to the city from the Victorian Bridge.¹⁴

In a 1927 lecture, he referred to the Executive Building, Treasury Building and the Supreme Court as ‘some of our most imposing public buildings’ and considered that they were ‘of such architectural values as to provide us with suitable models as regards mass and skyline’.¹⁵ His proposal involved the extension of Adelaide Street to North Quay and realigning of this part of the Quay with the Treasury Building. He also urged the development of a scheme that would ensure that Queen’s Garden became a square surrounded by fine buildings. During the 1930s while working as an architect with the Department of Public Works, Nowland was given the opportunity to develop these proposals into a number of building schemes for William Street.

William Street schemes

Nowland developed a number of proposals for William Street and the river bank. In 1927 He proposed retention of the Executive Building and removing what he described as ‘unhappy structures’ to the river side of this building. A terraced garden would extend to the water front

¹² *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³ *ABJQ*, 7 November 1924, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ *Sunday Mail*, 23 August 1925, p. 13.

¹⁵ *ABJQ*, 10 March 1927, p. 42. The Executive Building was also known as the Land Administration Building. The Supreme Court Building was demolished 1968 after it was extensively damaged by fire.

from the Executive Building and be flanked by an enlarged public library and an art gallery. He proposed doubling the size of the public library building and introducing a central feature containing a colonnaded portico. The extended library building would be part of a fine group of buildings facing the river. He proposed 'a really good wall', citing the wall facing the Thames River in front of the London County Council Offices as an appropriate model. In the Brisbane proposal he envisioned cut lawns and flower beds on the river embankment with shaded seats affording views of 'sunsets over One Tree Hill'.¹⁶

As an architect in the architectural office of the Department of Public Works he developed separate schemes for a new executive building and for a proposed police courts and police headquarters. Both these projects incorporated the existing former state library building located opposite Queen's Garden in William Street.¹⁷

Proposed executive building, William Street, Brisbane

Elevations for a new executive building prepared by Nowland for the Department of Public Works in July 1933 reflect ideas he had earlier presented in various town planning forums in relation to the development of William Street and the river frontage. In 1927 in a lecture for the Town Planning Association of Queensland, he put forward a number of proposals for improving the government precinct in William and George Streets. He remarked that:

The Public Library has a facade which is not unpleasing. The building could be doubled, a central feature introduced and the facade to the river with a colonnaded portico provided (after complete re-planning of the interior) would give a public building worthy of its position, and complete a very fine group of buildings facing the river.¹⁸

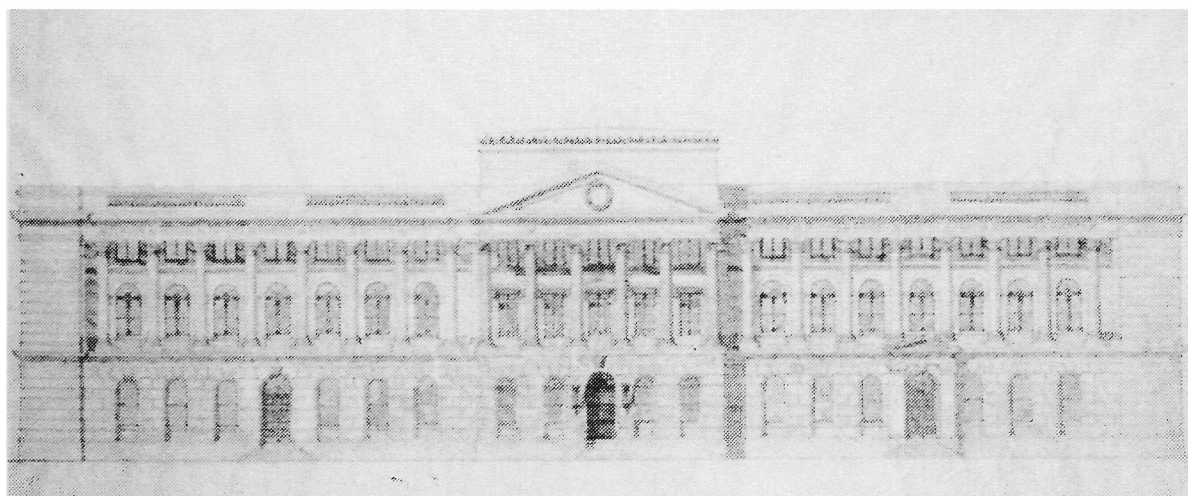


Figure 1: William Street elevation of proposed executive building 1933 (QSA PD93.5/1)

¹⁶ *ABJQ*, 10 March 1927, p. 42.

¹⁷ George Curtis Walker, draftsman with the Department of Public Works from 1875 to 1885, is credited with the design of this building. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, Brisbane, Queensland Museum, 1994, p. 203. It was the first Queensland Museum before conversion into the Queensland State Library.

¹⁸ *ABJQ*, 10 March 1927, p. 42.



*Figure 2: former state library William Street 1931
(JOL 185381p)*

In the William Street elevation the library is to the right and a central block and a wing have been added to form the new building. The ground floor provides a rusticated base to the building. The central block contains the main entrance with subsidiary entrances provided to each wing. The main entrance is approached by a small flight of stairs and sits within a modest porch framed by a rusticated arch and flanked by decorative wrought iron lamps. A giant order of

six Ionic columns forms a main entrance portico extending through two floors.¹⁹ Entry is gained to the porch from the first floor. A plain pediment with a moulded victory wreath crowns the portico. A decorated cornice runs around the building, the figurative decoration of the wings contrasting with the plainness of the raised discs in the centre. Each wing has a giant order colonnade in a Corinthian order, incorporating and extending the earlier library building. The imitation stone facings to the corners of the building combine with the rusticated base to give the building a dignified but robust character softened by the use of the Corinthian and Ionic orders. The building would have contributed an elegant and restrained presence to Queen's Garden.

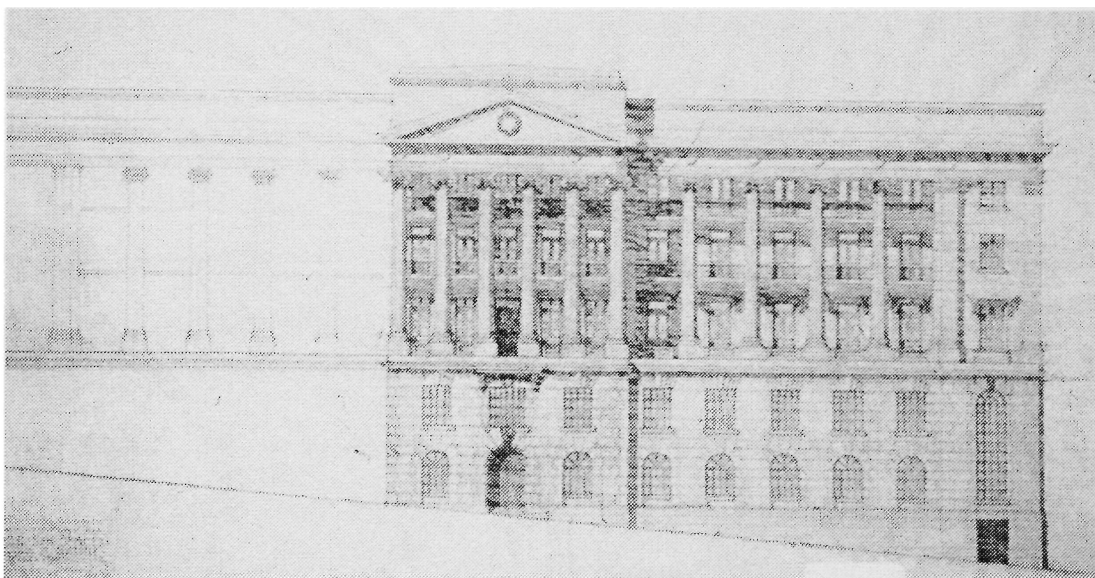


Figure 3: river elevation proposed new executive building William Street 1936 (QSA PD93.5/3)

¹⁹ A giant order is an order whose columns span two or more storeys.

The river elevation sits on a rusticated base formed by the river and ground floor levels. This elevation is much bolder than the William Street elevation and provides a grand and imposing presence to the river with each wing having a colonnade formed by giant order columns extending through three floors. The central block contains a portico also extending through three floors and formed by giant order columns. This elevation employs the Scamozzi Ionic order capital.²⁰ Each floor above ground level opens onto balconies within the colonnade providing splendid views to the river. The building would have an elegant majesty and be a commanding presence on the river.

Proposed Police Headquarters and Police Courts, William Street, Brisbane

Early in the 1930s it was acknowledged that new premises were required for a range of police functions in metropolitan Brisbane. The proposed extension of Adelaide Street through to North Quay would result in the demolition of buildings on the land at the top of Adelaide Street. These buildings included the Railway Building (which was being used to relieve congestion in the Police Courts), the lower courts, the Court of Petty Sessions Office and the City Watchhouse. The street could not be extended until accommodation had been provided elsewhere for the occupants of these buildings.²¹ New premises also would be required for the Criminal Investigations Branch (CIB), which was being removed from the site with the reassigning of the George-Elizabeth Streets corner to Queen's Garden.²² The library site in William Street was considered to be a suitable site for the proposed Police Headquarters and Police Courts being away from traffic noise and easily accessible to police vehicles transporting prisoners from Boggo Road gaol 'without parading them through the main City thoroughfares'.²³

The Police Headquarters was to occupy the land between the Library and the Agriculture and Stock Building (including the site occupied by the Commissariat Stores). It was to be a steel frame and concrete building of seven floors and roof with three floors below William Street level and four above. The building was designed with internal and external light areas with the lowest floor (river front level) to take the City Watchhouse and to be surrounded by retaining walls and walls to form a yard area. A tunnel from this level would connect through to the neighbouring Police Courts building. The building was to accommodate the CIB, Traffic Branch, Brisbane District Headquarters, Commissioner of Police, Police Welfare

²⁰ This matches the order employed in the Executive Building opposite in William Street.

²¹ *Courier Mail*, 12 February 1937 in Queensland State Archives (QSA), A/56834 B43-a-not numbered.

²² QSA A/56834 B34a-1; B34a-not numbered; B34a-4.

²³ *Telegraph*, 16 January 1935, in QSA TR1158/4 E390-5.

Activities (dormitories, lecture rooms, and a lecture theatre to seat 180), Caretaker and Watchhouse Keeper (quarters on the roof). These drawings were prepared in April 1936.²⁴

A sketch design was developed for the neighbouring Police Courts. This was to be a building of six floors and a roof and to accommodate Relief Office, Water Police, Single Constables' Dormitory, Court of Petty Sessions, Magistrates Court and associated offices, courtrooms, public spaces, prisoners' rooms and service areas. These drawings were prepared in June 1936.²⁵

In an article describing the government's proposed building program, the *Telegraph*, discussing the scheme for the Police Headquarters and Police Courts commented,

The main considerations underlying the next move in the scheme is to create the perfect executive block, with the Taxation building, the Executive building, the Treasury building, and Queen's Park as a starting point. ... The next (thing) is to use the available land along William Street in a proper manner to make the buildings on that side of the square harmonise and blend and balance those on the remaining three sides. Into this scheme new police courts and petty sessions office fit very snugly.²⁶

No elevations for the Police Headquarters have been located but those for the Police Courts indicate that this building would have been a dignified and imposing presence to Queen's Gardens and harmonised with the existing government buildings. The Police Courts building incorporated the colonnade and façade of the existing library and it can be seen within the elevation of the proposed larger building.

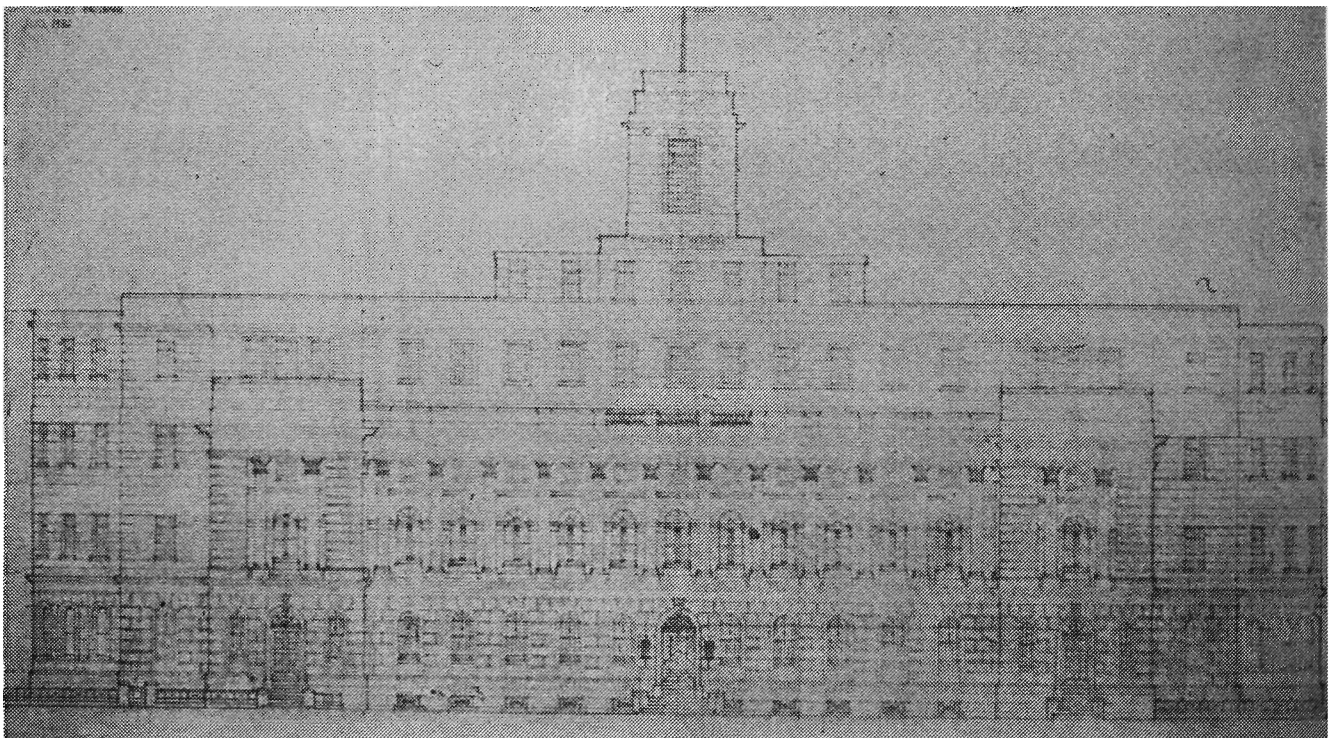


Figure 4: William Street elevation proposed Police Courts 1936 (QSA PD90.4/3)

²⁴ QSA PD90.2/1-8.

²⁵ QSA PD90.3/1-7 and PD90.4/1-13.

²⁶ *Telegraph*, 16 January 1935, in QSA TR1158/4 E390-5.

The rusticated ground storey carries a giant order Corinthian colonnade of twelve detached columns framed by small porches at each end. The elevation is terminated by semi-circular tribunes. A plain windowed upper storey sits above the piano nobile carrying a smaller roof attic crowned by a modest central tower providing additional vertical emphasis. A modest arched entry porch flanked by ornamental lamps indicates the main entrance and minor entrances sit below each of the first floor porches. One minor entrance is the main entrance to the former library. Despite the graceful and more decorated Corinthian order (remaining from the library) the austerity of the remaining parts of the building give it a tough, defensive character. The recessing of the elevation culminates in a sombre fort-like tower in the centre of the building. This recessive device parallels contemporary work elsewhere. It is reminiscent of the London Passenger Transport Building (Adams, Holden and Pearson 1929) which is recalled in the later Senate House, University of London (Holden 1933-39) where a similar austerity and recessing of the elevation occurs.²⁷ The elevation to the river receives similar treatment but the Corinthian colonnade has a central projecting portico formed by three pairs of columns rather than two end porches. A plain cornice with a frieze of plain raised discs sits above the colonnade. This elevation offers a grand and robustly elegant face to the river.

The outbreak of World War II meant that the priorities of the government building program altered and neither building was realised. In 1950 the Police Commissioner wrote to the Under Secretary for the Department of Public Works,

New Police Headquarters in Metropolitan Area

This proposal was first raised some years ago before the recent war, and had by 1939 reached blue print stage; but events at the time caused its indefinite postponement. Although such a building has been included in the Works Programme for some years past, no further consideration has been given to the project.²⁸

Wickham Park Development

Speaking at the laying of the foundation stone for the Dental Hospital and College in Turbot Street EM Hanlon stated that the building was to harmonise architecturally with its near neighbour, the Brisbane City Hall, making 'Turbot Street one of the most beautiful streets in any city in the Commonwealth'.²⁹

²⁷ John Musgrove ed., *Sir Banister Fletcher's a history of architecture*, London, Butterworth Heinemann, 1987, pp.1340-1341 (London Passenger Transport Building) and pp. 1340-1342 (Senate House).

²⁸ QSA A/56834 B34B/6.

²⁹ *Courier-Mail* 21 March 1938 in QHHS BN06/2. The Dental Hospital and College was part of the Wickham Park Development Scheme proposed by the government.

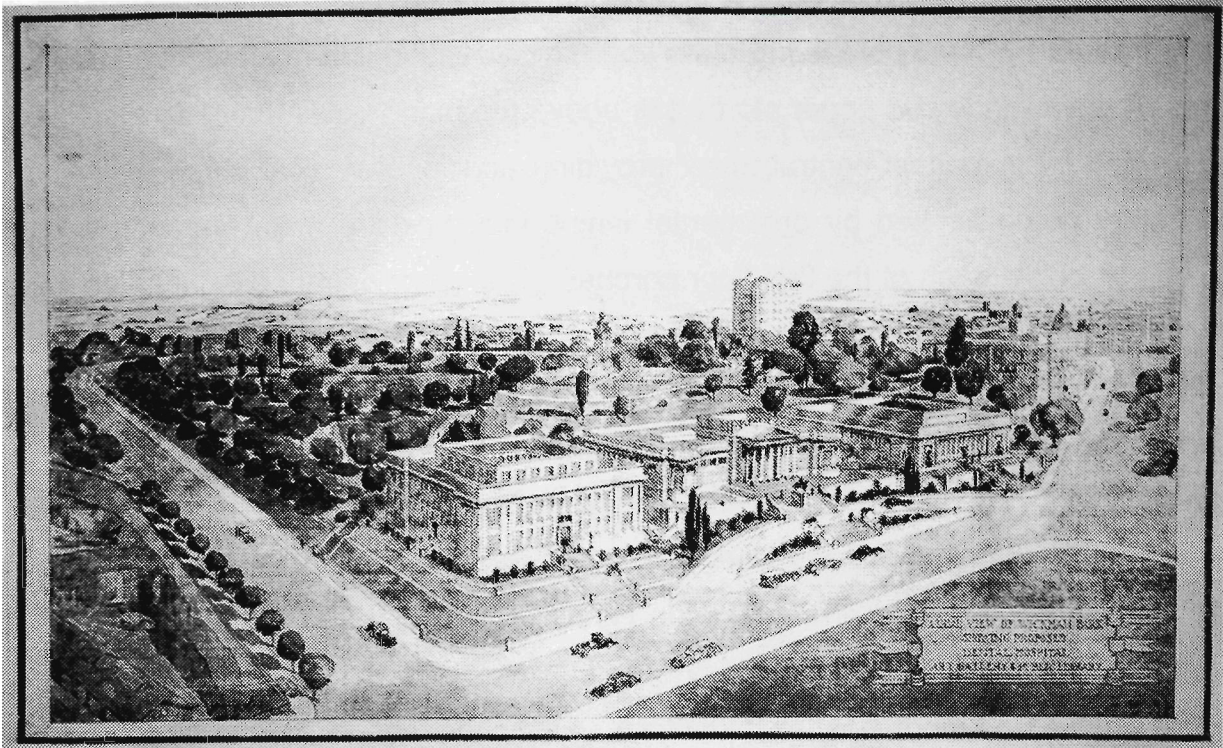


Figure 5: perspective drawing Wickham Park Beautification Scheme (QSA PD93.11)

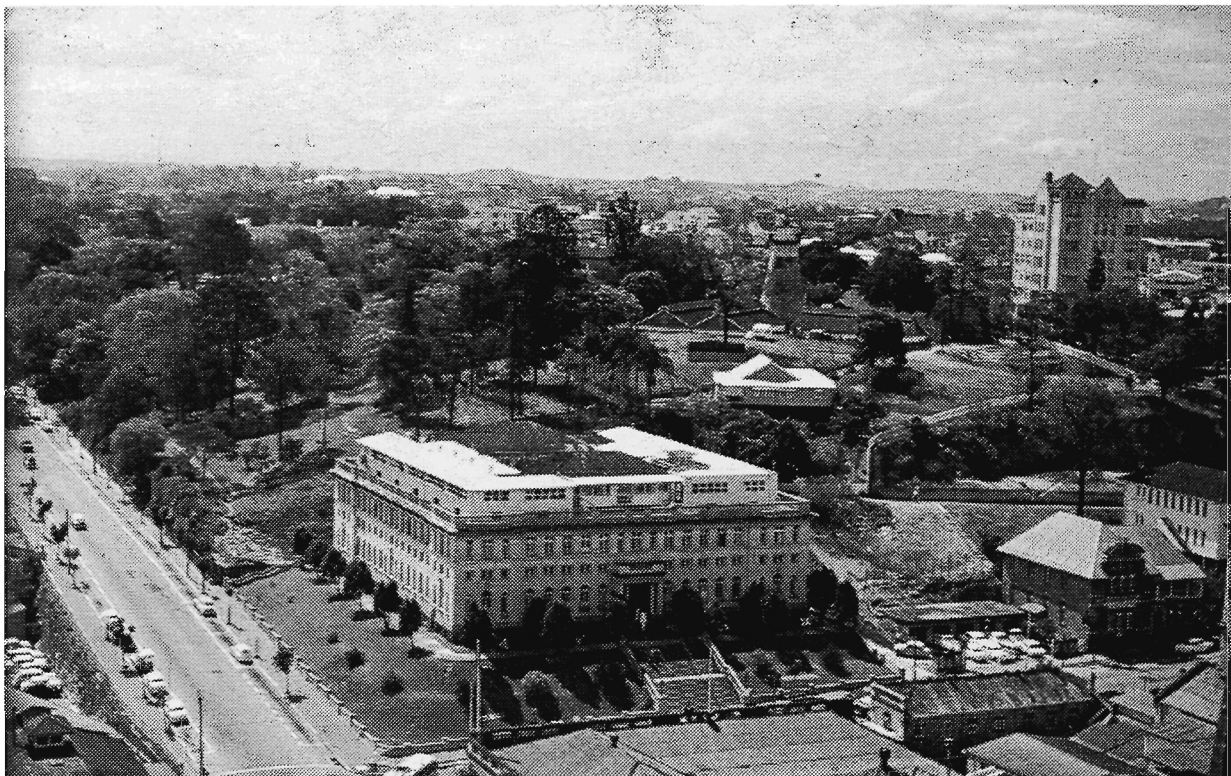


Figure 6: Dental Hospital and College c.1948 (JOL lpb00215)

The Dental Hospital and College was the only building realised in the cultural precinct proposed for the city block bounded by Albert and Turbot Streets, Jacob's Ladder and Wickham Terrace. Initially, the proposal was for a Dental Hospital and College and a public library to be built on the block with frontages to Turbot Street and a beautification of Wickham Park, integrating it with the terraced and landscaped grounds surrounding the two buildings. This scheme later expanded to incorporate the proposed new art gallery. A presentation perspective drawing (see figure 5) illustrates the three-building scheme and

park development. Nowland was responsible for the design of this scheme that was intended to dignify the character of the civic centre of Brisbane by providing public buildings offering a range of services to the community.³⁰

Either scheme, if realised, would have been a significant addition to the civic architecture of the central Brisbane area and of considerable cultural importance for the citizens of Queensland. This fine group of buildings in a classical idiom sited within terraced gardens of planted flower beds, promenades, memorials and fountains demonstrates a fine command of planning in the classical renaissance mode. These dignified buildings represent the aspirations of a community wishing to develop a rich cultural life by fostering an interest in and appreciation of scholarship and the arts, sited in the city centre, accessible to all and seen by all. The government was conscious of the powerful statement of civic pride and cultural maturity such a scheme represented and a number of editorials remarked that Queensland had ‘arrived’ and was proudly proclaiming its involvement in a rich cultural life.³¹ The *Courier Mail* observed,

A first-class public reference library and repository of historical records, and a truly, representative art gallery in the state’s capital, would be of cultural service to the whole of Queensland.³²

Each building has an individual character; each is distinguished from the other. There is a suggestion of hierarchy among the buildings with the much grander art gallery taking the central focus with the sweeping entry stairs drawing the visitor into the giant order Ionic columned portico. The Dental Hospital and College is plainer with its rusticated quoins and only an illusion to giant order columns in its elevation suggesting an unpretentious but important utilitarian building. The library has a dignified character and while maintaining an impressive presence has a much less dramatic portico entry than the art gallery. There is the suggestion that the library is organised about a domed central reading room. The organisation of the buildings on the site allows for generous areas of approach from a number of points. There is an easy entry from the Albert Street level, an entry from Edward Street which was served by a tram car and nearby Central Railway Station and an entrance to the grounds from Wickham Terrace near the Observatory.³³

The Wickham Park Beautification Scheme excited considerable public interest and comment. Wickham Park was chosen from among a number of sites and there was much

³⁰ QSA PD93.10/1-3

³¹ *Courier Mail*, 13 November 1934, p. 13. In particular see the comments by Mr Herring, treasurer to the board of trustees of the Art Gallery. See also further comments by Herring in *ABJQ*, 10 November 1934, p. 17.

³² *Courier Mail*, 13 November 1934, p. 12.

³³ *Courier Mail*, 13 November 1934, p. 13.

discussion about the suitability of this site.³⁴ But The *Courier Mail* enthused, ‘there is much to commend this choice of a site for a civic cultural centre’ remarking that it would show to good effect public buildings of architectural merit; its central location gave it the advantage of convenience for access; that the siting of the buildings at a higher level and in a park would ensure a quiet environ and ample natural lighting to the buildings; it was considered unlikely that the site would be hemmed in or overshadowed by further development; and it was thought that the site lent itself ‘to artistic approaches and aesthetic surroundings’.³⁵

Impetus for a cultural precinct

In 1935 the Queensland Art Gallery (and collection) was housed with the Queensland Museum in the Exhibition Building at Bowen Hills. This had long been considered an inappropriate and merely temporary location.³⁶ Fresh attention was focussed on the need for a suitable building for an art gallery with the launch of an appeal to raise funds to match the Darnell Bequest.³⁷ In his will John Darnell had bequeathed £10,000 towards the establishment of a ‘National Picture Gallery in the City of Brisbane’. A condition of the bequest was that a further £10,000 was to be raised by public subscription by 10 June 1935 or the bequest would lapse. The funds from this bequest were to be directed towards developing the art gallery collection. The *Courier Mail* remarked, ‘Brisbane at present was far behind every other city of equal importance in the Empire in its library and art gallery.’³⁸ There was a need to establish wide public support for the bequest and for a commitment to building a new art gallery. The initiative for raising the public funds came from sculptor Daphne Mayo who formed the Queensland Art Fund Darnell Committee. The committee lobbied the gallery trustees, Brisbane City Council and the state government. However, it was not until October 1934 that there was a concerted effort to raise the required funds. In attempts to encourage public subscriptions the state government emphasised that the gallery was a state asset and regional involvement was encouraged with a proposal to lend pictures from the collection to local shires for hanging in local galleries and halls. Recognising the need for a wide support base, Archbishop Duhig (Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane) observed that art and appreciation of art was not the preserve of a privileged few. He remarked that:

³⁴ *Telegraph*, 16 January 1935 in QSA TR1158/4E390-5. Other sites under consideration included the centre of the Botanic Gardens and the University of Queensland grounds at Gardens Point.

³⁵ *Courier Mail*, 13 November 1934, pp. 12-13.

³⁶ In 1982 a dedicated building to house the Queensland Art Gallery was opened. On the south bank of the Brisbane River, the building was designed by Robin Gibson.

³⁷ Extract of will held in Queensland Art Fund Mss., University of Queensland Fryer Library, UQFL139, box 7.

³⁸ *Courier Mail*, 31 January 1935, p. 13.

Mr Forgan Smith could do no greater thing for the rank and file of the people than he has told us his Government proposed to do – to put the riches of literature and art within reach of the poorest children of the State.³⁹

The trustees of the art gallery were anxious to secure the Darnell Bequest and locate to appropriate premises. They considered that this would improve their chances of being viewed in a favourable light by the Carnegie Corporation which was undertaking an investigation of libraries and art galleries in Australia with a view to directing funds ‘in the interests of art and culture within the empire’.⁴⁰ The government contributed £4,000, the Brisbane City Council contributed £2,000, the balance of £4,000 was raised by public subscription and the Darnell Bequest was secured.⁴¹ Sadly, the art gallery building in Wickham Park was not.

In March 1938 the site for the proposed public library was excavated and a guard fence erected about the area.⁴² No further construction work for the library was undertaken. The Dental Hospital and College was erected and opened in July 1941. The Second World War had intervened and with the priorities of the government building program focussed on the civil defence work the Wickham Park Beautification Scheme was never completed. After the war, the government public works building program focus on housing, health and educational facilities combined with shortages of materials and labour precluded a resumption of the construction of cultural buildings for the state until the 1970s South Bank Cultural Centre Development.

Other visions for Brisbane

Nowland was not alone in his vision of a river front and government precinct planned as a harmonious ordered composition of noble public buildings and parks. In 1912, the artist Lloyd Rees had produced drawings depicting an arcadian ‘Brisbane of my own creation’ which was ‘an imaginary city of boulevards, riverside quays, graceful bridges, trees, squares and fountains’.⁴³ In 1913, the architect AE Brooks proposed a design for William Street extending from Queen Street to Parliament House. The Executive Building was to be repeated in two new buildings opposite in William Street and again beyond Margaret Street.⁴⁴

³⁹ *ibid.*,

⁴⁰ *ABJQ*, November 1934, p. 17. The *Courier Mail* also carried comments on the value of attracting funding such as that on offer from the Carnegie Corporation. *Courier Mail*, 1 February 1935, p. 13.

⁴¹ *ABJQ*, 10 June 1935, p. 11.

⁴² QSA Tr1158/4, E470/2 and E470/7.

⁴³ Lloyd Rees, *The small treasures of a lifetime*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1988, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Stephen Gee, “Diligence and good conduct with sound ability”: the life and work of Arnold Edward Brooks FRAI, 1872-1958’, B.Arch. thesis, University of Queensland, 1987, p. 15.

Brisbane since the 1970s

Since the 1970s government policy in relation to public buildings has been increasingly driven by a fiscal imperative that is profit focused with little regard for the consequences this has for historic and symbolic associations that public buildings have and transmit. Government building programs have increasingly focused on demolition of existing fabric, disposal of government buildings, locating government departments in leased commercial premises, construction of faceless high-rise towers to accommodate government services and abandoning public buildings to commercial interests.

By way of example – in the 1970s the construction of a new Executive Building in George Street signalled a departure from building programs of previous governments. In 1889 the premier's office was in the Treasury Building, just a flight of stairs above Queen Street. In the old Executive Building, fronting onto Queen's Gardens, the Department of Premier and Cabinet was housed in second floor offices overlooking the park and the Cabinet room was within view of the citizens from 1905 to 1971. From the 1970s, the premier and cabinet have been closeted away in the heights of the new Executive Building, a high-rise tower indistinguishable from other such towers in the city except for the crest of the Queensland Government on its rooftop parapet.

A further change in government policy occurred in 1992. With the appropriation of the Treasury Building for a casino, the Land Administration Building for a hotel, Queen's Garden as a forecourt to the hotel and casino and roof to the underground carpark there was a further erosion of the concept of dignity and respect that occasioned the commissioning of these government buildings that had constituted the precinct as a public face of government.

Between 2001 and 2008 a number of urban design proposals were put forward for the redevelopment of the northern bank of the Brisbane River adjacent to William Street – at this time the area became known as 'North Bank' – encompassing the area between the Victoria Bridge and the Alice Street parliamentary precinct. North Bank includes the area of William Street previously discussed. In 2009 it accommodates eight sites included in the Queensland Heritage Register. It also includes Queen's Wharf Road, possibly the oldest thoroughfare in Brisbane and the Riverside Expressway constructed in the 1970s.

The proposed development of the North Bank of the Brisbane River required the developer to provide considerable public infrastructure in exchange for the river land. A range of proposals were presented, all comprising large tower buildings on platforms over the river. These proposed buildings would have a significant impact on the William Street precinct, especially with regard to views and vistas to and from these buildings. The National Trust Queensland contended that 'the heritage buildings of William Street are linked aesthetically

as well as historically and have a strong connection to the river.⁴⁵ The views of the river and Mt Coot-tha from different parts of the inner city, particularly the river edge, are a distinguishing feature of the city of Brisbane. Any high-rise tower development in the North Bank area will further wall the inner city area and restrict these quintessential Brisbane views. As identified in the schemes developed by Nowland for this area, it is important to preserve the line of vision to the Taylor Range and access and views to the river.⁴⁶

As with the proposals for the Wickham Park beautification, there was strong community response to the North Bank proposals. The latter were largely seen as an attempt to privatise public space for private gain to the detriment of the amenity of the city. They certainly did not demonstrate a vision of a river front and government precinct planned as a harmonious ordered composition of elegant public buildings and parks as expressed in the unbuilt schemes discussed in this paper.

⁴⁵ http://www.heritageatrisk.org.au/North_Bank,_Brisbane.html

⁴⁶ <http://qld.greens.org.au/media-releases/greens-submission-on-north-bank-development-proposal>

