

The history of the building

This chapter traces the history of the Old Museum Building. Its purpose is to sketch the major events in the story of the place as an introduction to the discussion of significance later in this report.

Originally built as an exhibition hall and concert hall in 1891, the building sits on the site of an earlier building that burned down in 1888. In the late 1890s the exhibition hall was converted to accommodate the Queensland Museum which transferred to the building in 1899. The concert hall continued as the venue for performances and meetings until 1930 when it was modified to house the Queensland Art Gallery. In 1973 the Art Gallery moved away and the museum took over the whole building. In 1986 the museum moved to new purpose-built accommodation in the Queensland Cultural Centre on the south bank of the Brisbane River opposite the city centre.

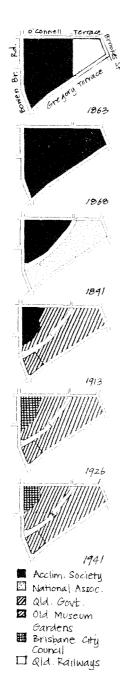
Precursors

The site on which the Exhibition Building stands was occupied by Aboriginal people before and after European settlement. The Brisbane area was inhabited by people who spoke the Turrbal language and they have been *described in terms of five identifiable clans, although other clans no doubt lived in the area.*¹ The "Duke of York's" clan occupied the Brisbane metropolitan area on the north side of the river. Much of the little that is now known about Aboriginal occupation of the area is drawn from the book *Tom Petrie's reminiscences of early Queensland,* written by Constance Campbell Petrie in 1904 and based on her father's recollections told to her many years after the events. Tom Petrie identified the area of the Exhibition Building and the exhibition grounds as the headquarters of the Duke of York's clan – this campsite was known as Barrambin.²

When my father was quite a boy he was sent once to look for some strayed cows to York's Hollow (the present Exhibition Ground), which was all wild bush, and was a great fighting ground for the blacks ... the blacks were all camped there ...³

Although it is interesting that these few facts about the area have been recorded, no evidence of Aboriginal occupation has been found on the site in recent times.⁴ The Old Museum is within an area recently claimed by the Turrbal People.





Land tenure of the original Acclimatisation Society grounds at various times, based on survey plans [Old Museum Gardens Conservation Study].

The Acclimatisation Society

The earliest recorded European use of the site was by the Acclimatisation Society of Queensland. This society was formed in 1863 to introduce, propagate and distribute useful plants from overseas countries.⁵ In July 1863 the society was granted in trust 32 acres of land.⁶

This land was the area now bounded by Bowen Bridge Road, O'Connell Terrace, Brookes Street and Gregory Terrace and became known as Bowen Park. (see illustration 5, which shows the extent of this land grant). The society used the site to grow and propagate the plants and seeds sent from other parts of the colony and around the world. They built an office and boardroom, bush-house and glass-house, and had an orchard and gardens for decorative plants. Various introduced animals were kept and grazed on the site. It seems the plantings were extensive and quickly developed. By 1871 the society's garden was seen as a place of public instruction and recreation. In 1887 the creek in the lower area, where the railway now runs, was dammed to form a series of decorative ponds.

The Acclimatisation Society was very active for its first thirty years introducing, testing, propagating and distributing new plant materials. It played an important role in the beginnings of commercial agriculture in Queensland, and introduced or trialed many crops including mango trees, ginger plants, sugar cane, olive trees and choko vines. Its interests went beyond plants of purely commercial value; ornamental and garden trees and shrubs were also introduced, and animals too; at various times deer, llamas, rabbits and goats were on show at Bowen Park.

It is not clear how the Acclimatisation Society used all parts of the 32 acres at its disposal. It appears there was poor soil over much of the grounds, in particular the later museum site, and that the main display gardens visited by the public were on the northern and lower part of their land, part of which is the present Bowen Park.

As Brisbane developed, the society's grounds came under some pressure from other prospective users. In 1879 some of the land was leased to the newly established Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association for a period of 50 years for use as an exhibition ground. Land was also resumed for the construction of the Sandgate railway line in 1881 and, in 1890, the society surrendered more land for expansion of the exhibition ground. In the Acclimatisation Society's heyday many prominent Queensland pastoralists, professional and business people were members – people who played an active part in the development of the colony. Later, as commercial plant nurseries grew, and as a range of other public enterprises in horticulture and agriculture developed, the Acclimatisation Society lost support.

The 1890s depression affected the maintenance of the gardens and many plants were sold or transferred to the Botanic Gardens. Under the *Acclimatisation Society Act* of 1907, which came into effect in 1914, the



society's remaining land was transferred to the Brisbane City Council as a reserve for public park purposes. The gardens, still in fine condition and a popular destination for the public, were redeveloped in a different style by the council between 1914 and 1917.



5 Survey plan, 1868, showing the land granted to the Acclimatisation Society (shaded) partly surrounded by suburban allotments, and bordered by the hospital and a rifle range. The society took up land in the Redland Shire, where it continued to operate in a small way until the late 1950s. 14

The Queensland National Agricultural & Industrial Association

The Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association was formed in 1875, with the aim of promoting agricultural and industrial developments. A number of leading citizens were persuaded to serve on the managing council of the National Association. The newly constituted association leased 23 acres, which fronted Gregory Terrace, from the Acclimatisation Society. They planned to build a show ring, stands, sheds and other improvements on the site.

The first Brisbane Exhibition Building (illustration 6) was opened by the National Agricultural and Industrial Association on 22 August 1876. Sited on the angle of Bowen Park formed by the junction of Gregory Terrace and Bowen Bridge Road, this building was designed by F D G Stanley – then Colonial Architect – *with the object of obtaining a well ventilated and lighted building at as small a cost as possible*. ¹⁶ A drawing of Stanley's complete design was published in the illustrated newspapers at the time of the opening. This drawing showed a timber building with exposed cross bracing and a corrugated iron roof. ¹⁷ The building formed a cross in plan, with a large dome surmounting the crossing of the nave and transepts.





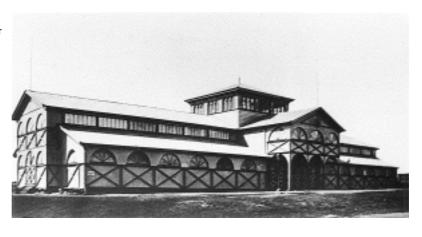
Only a part of Stanley's design was built – just a rectangular building with side aisles – by the contractor Ebenezer Chapman. ¹⁸ The building was never finished as designed, but by the time of the 1877 Exhibition a modest lantern light had been added to the building instead of the dome (illustration 7). It is not known how the grounds around this Exhibition Building were developed, but by 1888 about £20,000 had been spent on improvements. ¹⁹

6 The first Exhibition Building. F D G Stanley's design of 1876. [Town and Country Journal 26 August 1876]



From small beginnings the National Association grew to take such ...a commanding lead of all similar societies that their periodical exhibitions, instead of being local in character, have been quite equal to, if not of higher excellence than those of the sister societies in Victoria and New South Wales. Therefore when the Exhibition Building was completely destroyed by fire on 13 June 1888, it was of great concern to the people of Brisbane that it be replaced as soon as possible. 1

7 The first Exhibition Building after the central lantern was built in 1877. Stanley's design for a square dome was not carried out. [JOL 61133].





8
1913 survey plan, showing the
Acclimatisation Society grounds
reduced to a fraction of its
original area after land was taken
for the exhibition grounds and
the railway.



Design and construction

With the destruction of the Exhibition Building the council of the National Association ... felt the necessity of erecting a permanent Exhibition Building worthy of the growing importance of the colony to replace the old wooden structure... The council resolved to hold a design competition for a new building and placed this advertisement in the newspapers at the beginning of July 1888:

TO ARCHITECTS

Architects are invited to send Competitive DESIGNS for the NEW EXHIBITION (Brick) BUILDING at Bowen Park. Prizes of £50, £25 and £15 will be given for the best three Designs. Designs must be sent under Motto to the Undersigned not later than SATURDAY, 10 August. All further particulars can be obtained on application to

ERNEST A SMITH
Secretary
Queensland National Association. 23

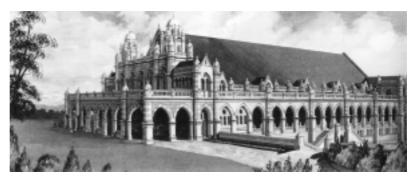
The association's records show that the competition was held and the prizes awarded. First prize of £50 was given to a design under the motto *rough sketch* – pen name of the architect G H M Addison.²⁴ However the new building did not immediately proceed. While the design



competition was under way the association was offered an exhibition building from Liverpool, England. ²⁵ This building had also been used at an exhibition in Antwerp ²⁶ and was presumably prefabricated, perhaps made of cast-iron similar to the Crystal Palace. The committee considered this offer seriously, and commissioned agents in England to investigate the building's structural suitability. ²⁷ But the association failed to raise enough money to buy this structure and had to withdraw its offer. ²⁸

The National Association was plagued with money problems. Minutes of their meetings reveal they had an overdraft and were always concerned about how to reduce it.²⁹ Also their relationship with the Acclimatisation Society was not harmonious and this had to be resolved before a new building could proceed. The newspapers of the period have many accounts of the conflict between the two organisations.³⁰ Although the National Association and the Acclimatisation Society had many members and office bearers who belonged to both organisations, the relationship between the organisations seems to have been marked by distrust and jealousy.

This ink and gouache drawing, signed G H M Addison del. and marked Oakden, Addison and Kemp, Architects, apparently shows Addison's winning entry in the design competition. It is similar to the building as it was built, but without the concert hall wing. Other points of difference include the pointed arches, large porte-cochère and generally more lavish detail. It is not clear from the picture what materials were intended, but perhaps they included the carved limestone that Addison used on other buildings. [Reproduced by permission, from the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane]31



The real problem was that the National Association had become the more important group, with a considerable annual turnover, yet it was a tenant of the Acclimatisation Society. The Acclimatisation Society had fulfilled a vital role when it was formed in the 1860s, but as the colony developed commercial interests had usurped its position and its only income was derived from the National Association. Proposition and the ownership of the site and how to finance the building occupied the association for well over a year. The problems were eventually resolved by the passage of the *National Association and Acclimatization Society Act* of 1890. By this legislation the Queensland Government resumed the land from the Acclimatisation Society and granted it to the National Association. The National Association was also empowered to borrow money from the government to erect its new building.

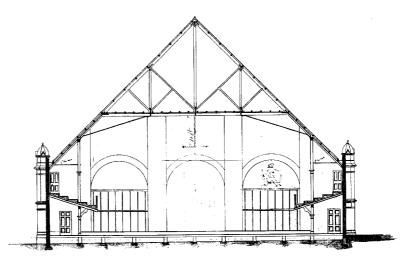
The original design competition had been won by the architect G H M Addison (rough sketch). This was not the first competition held by the National Association that Addison had won. When the National Association advertised for a design for the Secretary's residence at the Exhibition, to cost £800, Messrs Oakden, Addison and Kemp had an opportunity of showing what improvement could be made in the construction of wooden cottages. They were successful in this



competition and erected for this small sum a cottage universally admired, the monotony of the wooden walls being broken by reeded and moulded dado and coffered ceilings.³⁵ This cottage stood in the exhibition grounds near Brookes Street, it no longer exists.

With his competition design for the Exhibition Building Addison had submitted ...a tender under the limit of £20,000 with his entry.³⁶ The association was keen to reduce the cost and after consultation with Addison it was decided that ...a plain brick building of a similar size...³⁷ could be erected for £10,000. Then further discussions within the association led to a change of brief and a resolution that ...in place of the previously accepted design, the new Exhibition Building [would] be erected in a T-shape so that a portion thereof may be available when required for concerts, meetings, etc.³⁸ The motivation for including a concert hall was the idea that its rental would provide sufficient income to repay the government loan.³⁹

10 Cross section through the concert hall wing, one of the contract drawings.

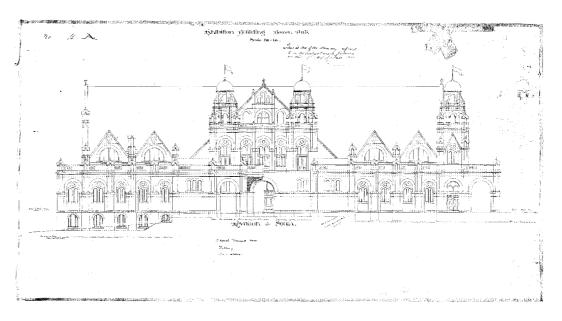


It is not clear how the idea of the concert hall evolved, but it was raised as early as 1888. One of the competition designssubmitted under the motto "Bert" by Messrs JJ Coben and G McLay [C H McLay?] included a concert hall. ⁴⁰ This concert hall, which could be used for exhibitions when necessary, had a stage with a stepped platform for a choir, an organ and upper level galleries. The Cohen and McLay design, which was published in the Building and Engineering Journal, was similar in style to the Melbourne Exhibition Building. The design also included a basement with a ...commodious dining ball and refreshment saloon with kitchen. ⁴¹ Although the entry by Bert did not receive a prize in the competition it is interesting to speculate that some of its ideas were incorporated into the design that was eventually constructed.

In 1890 G H M Addison amended his design and a T-shaped building, accommodating an exhibition hall, concert hall and basement dining room, was built. Addison, who was a skilled illustrator, drew two perspective renderings (illustrations 12 & 35) of the building that were



widely published at the time. ⁴² Fortunately, most of the contract drawings have survived in the records of the Works Department; several are reproduced in this report.



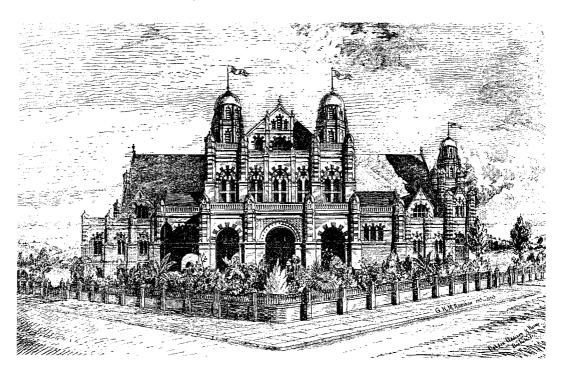
Addison's drawing of the south elevation, one of the contract drawings. In the centre is the entrance to the concert hall; on the right is the entrance to the exhibition hall; on the left, at the lower level, is the entrance to the dining room.

The foundation stone was laid on 25 April 1891. The contract required John Quinn the builder to construct the building quickly, as the main hall was to be completed by the first of August and the whole building finished within twelve months. John Quinn was under a heavy penalty to ensure that the exhibition hall was ready for the annual exhibition week. In fact Quinn and his workmen outstripped expectations and the building was completed in a remarkably short time. This was viewed as a considerable achievement, and commended in the local press:

The first brick was laid in the latter end of February, so that 23 weeks only have expired from then until what may be called completion, for the building is now complete with the exception of the ceiling boards under the concert hall roof, and one or two coats of paint here and there. Mr Quinn is, we believe, the first builder in the colony who has moved his machinery onto the site of building for the purpose of doing bis own joinery work, and by this means saving a lot of valuable time otherwise lost in journeying to and from the workshop. While the brickwork was in progress about 300 men of all trades and four steam engines were constantly at work, while at the present time about 200 hands are employed. The whole of the brickwork is now complete, and the only piece of scaffolding which will be visible on Tuesday will be in front of the concert ball. The total number of bricks used was 1,600,000 and they were all delivered by the Brick Manufacturers Association in three months. To fully appreciate the great progress which has been made it is necessary to see the building, and then to remember the fact that 23 weeks ago not a brick was laid.



In building circles the feat is regarded as meritorious, and one which furnishes a building record in Queensland, if not for Australia. At the beginning of the contract it was freely said that it was impossible to finish the structure before Exhibition time, but it has been done, and without a single mishap of any kind. Altogether there have been two or three weeks rain during the progress of the work which being deducted from the 23 weeks makes the record still more remarkable. A fact worthy of notice is that the iron which composes the principals of the roof of the main hall was in England in March, and in Brisbane and in position on 23rd June.⁴³



Addison's 1891 perspective drawing of the Exhibition Building. [The Queenslander 4 April 1891].

The building was built of brick with a corrugated iron roof. The glazed bricks were locally manufactured by James Campbell, who also produced the terracotta elements. The iron roof framing and sheeting was imported from England. 44 The building was T-shaped in plan, with the concert hall - the shaft of the T - projecting to the intersection of Gregory Terrace and Bowen Bridge Road. The top of the T was the exhibition hall. On the northern side of the exhibition hall was a colonnaded verandah, with access to the hall through French doors. Half the area under the exhibition hall was a large open dining room with an adjacent kitchen. The basement was built of dark purple glazed bricks, and the upper walls were red and cream bricks. Both the exhibition hall and the concert hall had projecting porte-cochères - the concert hall one decorated with terracotta tiles. An openwork terracotta parapet ran along the tops of the brick walls, punctuated by the caps of engaged piers that ran up the walls. The principal facades of the exhibition and concert halls were each marked by a pair of towers. 45



The architectural style of the Exhibition Building has caused much comment as it is unique in Brisbane. An old National Trust of Queensland citation describes the building as an ...excellent example of large scale flamboyant Victorian eclectic practices in architecture, executed in decorated brickwork. In this case the styles are mainly Romanesque, Byzantine, Saracenic and Indian. 46 In current Australian parlance its style is called Federation Romanesque. Its simple massing, parapeted gables, strongly modelled semicircular arched openings, its towers and arcades, are among the indicators of the style. 47 The building consists of two simple shed forms put together and wrapped with a decorative skin of brickwork. The decorative effects are richest on the two entrance facades, where the elements are composed for visual effect, rather than expressing an underlying structural form. It is interesting that at the time the Exhibition Building was officially opened the architecture was not described in terms of style, but rather decoration and effect - the reporter in the Brisbane Courier wrote:

The ruling idea of the building is to make the constructive features aid the ornamentation. This is clearly seen in the elevations where the abutments to the roof principals give a striking light and shade.⁴⁸

13
The earliest known photograph
of the Exhibition Building,
published in the Building and
Engineering Journal in
December 1891.



The grounds

Addison's drawing of the building (illustration 12) shows a brick boundary wall topped by metal railing, with densely planted shrubberies behind the wall. Pairs of gates are shown midway along Bowen Bridge Road and Gregory Terrace. But the grounds were not treated this way when the building was first constructed. The earliest known photograph of the Exhibition Building (illustration 13) shows the building with the grounds in a fairly undeveloped state. The forecourt to the exhibition hall had not been laid out, but there were bush houses on the northern side of the building. A plan of the National Association's site drawn in 1891 shows an entrance off Bowen Bridge Road and a turnstile entry on



Gregory Terrace. Photographs taken around 1895 and 1897 show the caretaker's residence and ladies' cottage in front of the building in the corner of Bowen Bridge Road and Gregory Terrace. A paling fence extends along these street frontages and two large stands of bamboo screen much of this southern elevation. These cottages and bamboo are noted on an 1897 plan. The grounds to the north were devoted to exhibitions. A connection, possibly a bush house, is shown from the exhibition hall to the main display area.

14
The Exhibition Building around
1895 – the clumps of bamboo,
the timber cottages and the
paling fence at the corner were
all removed soon after, to allow a
proper entrance to be formed for
the concert hall. [IOL 61132].



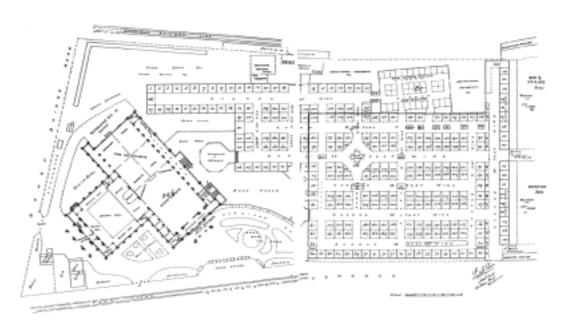
The earliest known detailed plan of the grounds is one prepared in 1897 by Leslie G Corrie, architect, for the Queensland International Exhibition (illustration 15). This plan shows a formal layout of carriage drive, pathways, shrubbery, flower beds and a fountain. Bush houses abutting and extending from the northern side of the Exhibition Building framed and terminated the avenue approach from the exhibition grounds. The main entrance remained from Bowen Bridge Road with the carriage drive running in front of the concert hall porte-cochère, around into the porte-cochère of the exhibition hall then curving out to the gate on Gregory Terrace. Shrubberies are indicated along Bowen Bridge Road and Gregory Terrace between the fence and drives. A formal arrangement of grass-edged flower beds, with a fountain as the centrepiece of one, are laid out within the curve of the carriage drive.

The exhibition hall

The exhibition hall, which ran east-west and formed the top of the T-plan, was very plain and utilitarian internally. The inside of the walls were of face brickwork and the ceiling unlined, with the roof framing and underside of the corrugated iron visible. The hall was entered at the eastern end via a vestibule. There was a gallery above the vestibule, which overlooked the hall and also gave access to a terrace over the porte-cochère. Along the northern wall of the hall were pairs of French doors that opened onto the verandah. The main light to the hall was provided by a large coloured glass window on the western elevation.



Like all the decorative features of the building this window was designed on a limited budget and was composed of large pieces of glass in a geometric pattern. When the building was under construction it was stated that the window ...although inexpensive and free from elaboration, will be most effective.⁴⁹



15 Leslie G Corrie's plan of the building and grounds, copied from the program of the 1897 Queensland International Exhibition.

The plan of the Queensland International Exhibition 1897 (illustration 15) indicates how the exhibition hall was used – half the space was devoted to mining exhibits (illustration 16) and the other half to a fine arts display. The adjacent verandah was used to display specimens of Queensland coke and coal. The fine arts section of the hall was further subdivided with timber partitions into four areas, displaying Australian, Foreign, British and Queensland items.

The records of the National Association indicate that the association had financial problems even before it started to build the new Exhibition Building. Therefore it is not surprising that the economic depression of the 1890s, with the added responsibility of repaying the government loan, was too much for the association. In 1897 the government took over the Exhibition Building and liquidated the association's debts.



16
The interior of the exhibition hall during the Queensland International Exhibition of 1897. This is the Mining Court, with a display of obelisks showing the relative production of Australian gold mines. [JOL 171924].

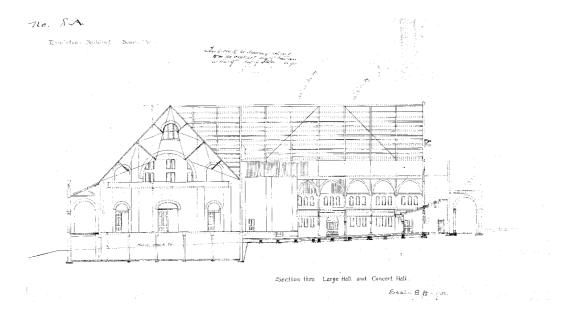


The Exhibition Concert Hall

A concert hall was not part of the association's original brief for the design competition, but the idea of building such an auditorium must have developed soon after. When the committee was considering buying the Liverpool Exhibition Building inquiries were made as to ...whether a portion of the building could easily and without much expense be adapted for a hall suitable for holding concerts, public meetings etc. ⁵⁰ In 1890 when G H M Addison was preparing the tender drawings, he was asked to amend the design to include the concert hall. The concert hall was intended as a means of raising money and the association was specific ...that the site of the new building be with the Concert Hall facing the corner of Gregory Terrace and Bowen Bridge Road, about equidistant from both fences. ⁵¹



The main entrance to the concert hall was via the porte-cochère which led to a lobby. The lobby had a ticket office, ladies' and gentlemen's retiring rooms and stairs to the gallery above. It was possible also to enter the rear of the hall through entrances on the eastern and western walls. The auditorium itself was a large room with a gallery on three sides. The floor sloped towards the stage at the northern end of the hall; this stage had a stepped platform to accommodate large choirs. Three large arches separated the concert hall and exhibition hall. The central arch was for the organ – it remains uncertain how the arched openings were used, but they were filled with timber partitions from early in the building's life. The organ was supplied with air by bellows driven by a gas engine in the basement. Staircases on either side of the stage also gave access to the gallery. The hall did not have fixed seating; this allowed for some flexibility in the use of the space despite the disadvantage of the sloping floor.



One of G H M Addison's 1891 contract drawings, a section cutting across the exhibition hall and dining room (on the left) and along the centre line of the concert hall (on the right). In the concert hall, note the slightly raked floor and the gallery at the back and sides of the auditorium.

Until the Exhibition Concert Hall was built the main musical venue in the city had been the Centennial Hall in Adelaide Street, which accommodated 1,500 people. ⁵² By comparison the Exhibition Concert Hall, with its fine pipe organ and much larger seating capacity, could fairly claim to be the best musical facility in Brisbane. At the time of its opening it was:

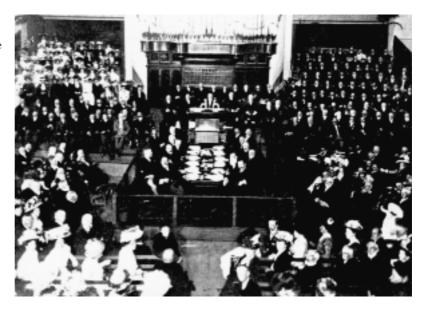
...pronounced by competent musical authorities to be nearly perfect as regards arrangement and acoustic properties, and will seat 2,800 persons. It has a gallery on three sides (which will be used this year for the arts section of the Exhibition), easy access to which is gained from the four angles. The platform is arranged so that the singers will form a semi-circle around the conductor, and the orchestra is provided for on the floor level. The organ is to be placed in the centre arch at the back of the platform which divides the main hall from the concert hall



and the hall will be divided by temporary screens during concerts.⁵³

The association had accepted the £3,736⁵⁴ tender of *Celebrated Organ Builders, Messrs Willis & Son of London* in the middle of 1891.⁵⁵ The organ took twelve months to make and arrived in Brisbane in September 1892.

18
A photograph of the concert hall interior thought to date from the 1920s. People are sitting on the choir platforms to either side of the organ, as well as in the auditorium. [Queensland Museum photo].



When the government took over the ownership of the building it appeared that the organ, which the National Association had mortgaged, would have to be sold to an interstate buyer. Efforts were made to keep the organ in Brisbane. A committee was formed, but it failed to raise enough money. It was only when the Brisbane City Council offered to contribute £2,000 if £1,000 was raised by public subscription that the organ was secured for the people of Brisbane. The City Council bought the organ in January 1900 and it remained at the Exhibition Concert Hall which the council leased from the government. 56

While the council occupied the concert hall there was a program of regular concerts. These were not as well attended as they might have been, the inconvenient location being blamed for the poor numbers – Exceptionally low charges for the use of the hall and organ are made by the Council in order to popularize their use, but the long distance to the hall involving as it does so much loss of time and expense in transit, constitutes an effectual block.⁵⁷

Despite its inconvenient location, the concert hall was the setting for major civic functions including balls, such as the Coronation Ball in 1910,⁵⁸ and dinners. Highlights included recitals by visiting artists of the calibre of Dame Nellie Melba.⁵⁹ In May 1901 the concert hall was the venue for a Civic Concert for the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. The hall was festively decorated, a special musical program was performed and a large number of citizens attended. The royal concert box, designed by G H M Addison, Godfrey Rivers and others, was



considered a most artistic structure and described in glowing terms by the press:

There were eight pillars, which formed a dome at the top of which rested a large crown. The colours used in the decorations were pale pink, pale blue, and cream, with slight touches of heliotrope. The tops of the pillars were dipped with gold, the bas-relief ornamentation being in faint colours intermixed with gold. From the crown were lovely garlands of coloured roses and chrysanthemums, mixed with greenery. 60

In 1910 ladies' and gentlemen's toilet blocks were added to the concert hall. The City Council had been requesting sanitary accommodation for some time as ...the only conveniences of that kind at present available being situated in a remote corner of the museum grounds entirely out of the way and unfitted for evening use. These two brick blocks containing ECs were positioned on the outside of the building. The ladies' toilet block was on the western wall of the concert hall, while the gentlemen's block was situated on the other side of the concert hall, on the southern wall of the museum. 61

Although the concert hall was used for functions other than musical recitals, the rake of the floor in the auditorium was considered a disadvantage. The City Council thought the hall was only suitable for gatherings at which the audience remained seated. But the slope of the floor was gentle enough for dinners and dances to be held there.

In 1920 work started on a new City Hall – a long cherished project of the Brisbane City Council – which was to provide the city with a large centrally located civic auditorium. The organ was removed from the Exhibition Concert Hall, augmented and installed in the new City Hall auditorium. From its opening in 1930, the City Hall became the principal concert venue in Brisbane, leaving the Exhibition Concert Hall without a role in the city.

The Queensland Museum

The Queensland Museum was founded in January 1862 and developed as part of the Queensland Philosophical Society. The museum was operated by the society, with some government assistance, until 1871 when the government assumed full responsibility for the institution. ⁶² The first annual report of the society in 1862 stated that their first efforts had been directed at establishing the nucleus of a museum of natural science – the specimens were stored in the old windmill on Wickham Terrace. ⁶³ The collection stayed at the windmill until 1868 when the museum moved to a room formerly occupied by the Parliamentary Library in the Parliamentary Building, at the southern end of Queen Street. ⁶⁴ The museum moved again in 1873, to the old Post Office building in Queen Street. Like the previous accommodation this building proved small and unsuitable for the display and scientific purposes of a museum.



Eventually in 1879 a purpose built museum was erected in William Street to the design of architect G C Walker. Even this building proved inadequate. As early as 1884 it was judged too small and it was considered that a new building was needed. At one stage the government called tenders, but the project did not proceed.

19
A postcard of the museum. See the clerestory windows and dormer roof vents added during the conversion. [Author's collection].



When the government took over the Exhibition Building it was decided to adapt the exhibition hall to accommodate the museum. So in 1899, after twenty years in a purpose built building, the museum moved to the converted exhibition hall. The 1879 building was then the headquarters of the State Library, until 1988 when the library moved to a new building in the Queensland Cultural Centre. ⁶⁶

The museum conversion

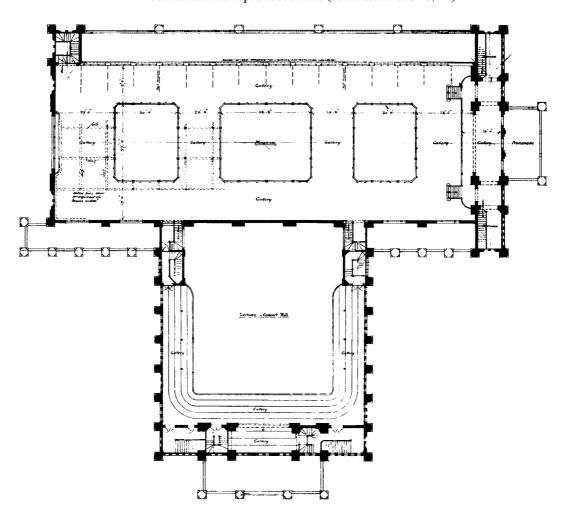
The design for converting the exhibition hall to house the museum was prepared by architects of the Department of Works. Although the drawings for the conversion are not signed, this was during the era when A B Brady was Government Architect. His signature and comments appear on the letters and memos in the Works Department's files. The files also reveal that the architect Thomas Pye was involved in the museum conversion project. In 1897 Pye was Chief Draftsman in the department. There is a letter on file from G H M Addison offering to sell the contract plans of the Exhibition Building to the department for six guineas. It was Pye who inspected the plans and recommended that they be purchased.

The roles of Brady and Pye is made clear in evidence provided to a Royal Commission that inquired into the administration of the Department of Public Works in 1900. Brady did not personally design buildings, but retained a degree of control by seeing and approving all of the drawings that were issued for approval of clients or for construction. For most of the 1890s, Pye prepared the designs for major buildings. After 5 March



1899, this responsibility was shared with J S Murdoch. Pye was responsible for delegating minor work to other staff in the office and presenting the drawings to Brady. 70

Pye was probably involved in the design of the conversion. Whoever its author was, the architectural skill of the conversion must be acknowledged. Several of the contract drawings for the museum conversion are reproduced here (see illustrations 20, 21).



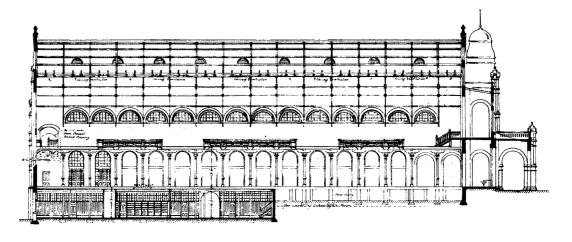
20
A contract drawing for the museum conversion of 1897. This plan shows the layout of the mezzanine floor introduced in the exhibition hall.

Tenders were called in March 1899 for the *Alteration To Exhibition Building For Museum.*⁷¹ The design provided for construction of a gallery within the main hall, and addition of a line of windows in the main northern wall to light the new gallery. The basement dining room was modified to become offices, preparation and storage spaces.

While the plans were being developed the trustees of the museum were asked to comment. It is interesting that they thought it unnecessarily extravagant to line the corrugated iron roof; they also suggested that the cross galleries should be dispensed with, remarking that they would



obstruct the main space. These objections were overridden. The trustees' letter is annotated by A B Brady, saying he is unable to recommend for approval the suggestions. However other minor recommendations from the Trustees, concerning turnstiles and entrances, were taken up. The conversion work cost just over £6,000 and was done under contract by G A Baumber. The museum moved into the converted building between October and the end of December 1899 and reopened to the public early in 1901.



21 A contract drawing for the museum conversion of 1897. This section shows the dormer roof vents, ceiling lining. clerestory windows and the mezzanine floor supported on timber posts, all of which were introduced in the former exhibition hall. In the basement, the former dining room is converted to offices and preparation rooms for the museum staff, using some timber removed from dividing partitions in the exhibition hall.

Development of the museum

The process of growth and development that had made all the previous museum accommodation obsolete continued once the museum was installed in its new home. The changes that were made to the building reflect the growth of the museum's collections, research interests, increases in staff, and changes in display methods.

In 1919 the museum acquired one of its most famous exhibits, the World War 1 German A7V fighting tank *Mephisto*. The tank had been captured by Australian troops and brought to Queensland as a war trophy. Initially the tank stood in the open at the entrance to the museum, directly in front of the porte-cochère. It was thought undesirable for the tank to be exposed like this, since it was vulnerable to damage by the weather. In 1920 a roofed shelter was designed for the tank. The terracotta tile roofed structure was at first put in front of the main museum entrance, the but was afterwards moved to the southern side of the building, and later moved northward again. *Mephisto* has been one of the museum's most famous and popular exhibits.

Another celebrated item in the museum's technology collection is Bert Hinkler's Avro Avian aeroplane, given to the museum by Hinkler in 1929. The plane was displayed in a flying position, hung on wires from the roof trusses in a void in the mezzanine floor.⁷⁷

The changes that were made to the interior of the museum reflect the development of display techniques. At first the museum was a static orderly arrangement of displays in glass cases. When Ronald Hamlyn-



Harris became director in 1910 he arranged for a number of dioramas to be built, as a means of presenting information in a lifelike and instructive manner. Dioramas such as the Aboriginal Campsite, the Limestone Cave and the Coral Pool became durable features of the museum's collection.



The interior of the museum. [Queensland Museum photo].

Although the museum had been collecting books since 1876 – the nucleus of a library – it was not until 1911 that a room was designated as a Library. It was Hamlyn-Harris's vision and enthusiasm that led to a professional library being established. The library was accommodated within the building by making two rooms at the western end of the basement into one and installing shelves.

In 1930 when the concert hall was being converted to an art gallery tenders were also called for enclosing the museum's porte-cochère. This work involved building brick panels between the arched openings and fitting new entrance doors, within the space created an attendants room and counter were built.⁸¹

Over the years the most constant cause for correspondence between the directors of the Queensland Museum and the Works Department have been white ants, leaking roofs and overflowing drains. There have been various infestations of white ants in the floors, staircases and roof structure, but they were always dealt with before serious damage occurred. Likewise the files are full of incidents such as storms which caused the roof to leak and the drains to overflow, usually to the detriment of the displays or collections.



23
Bert Hinkler's Avro Avian
aeroplane hung from the roof of
the museum [JOL 144069].



Although the Exhibition Building had been very competently converted it was *never altogether satisfactory for a museum*. In particular there was a continuing concern about fire safety of the building. In 1933 a visiting British expert wrote a report that condemned the building as a fire trap and a joke – entirely unsuitable as a museum. ⁸² During the 1970s this perception of the building as a fire hazard was used by the museum trustees to lobby for a new building. ⁸³

The grounds

The development of the grounds is explained in detail in the conservation study of the Old Museum Gardens.⁸⁴ The following paragraphs outline the developments.

At the time of the museum conversion the Queensland Museum grounds were separated from the remainder of the National Association land, and the grounds around the building were developed as an ornamental strolling garden. ⁸⁵ The cottages and bamboo were removed and in 1900 the boundary wall and fence along Bowen Bridge Road and Gregory Terrace was completed, with the entrance gates located at the corner. A caretaker's cottage was erected to the north, next to Bowen Bridge Road.

It remains a question for further research who was responsible for designing the gardens. The layout was already partly established by 1897, but John Jordan, Curator of the Museum Gardens from 1897 to 1929 may have had a role in their design and development. Photographs taken around 1906 show the gardens already well established, with a layout and planting character recognisable as very similar to that existing today.

Timber ferneries were important elements in the original design. These structures needed repair from time to time, as a memo records: As the Gardens attached to the museum is now one of the show places of the city and the bush house a special feature of the Gardens, I recommend that the Works Department be requested to have an inspection made



[of the bush house]... ⁸⁶ Some repairs were carried out in 1903, and in 1906 tenders were called for *reconstruction of Bush-house*.

Through most of the time the museum occupied the site, the gardens and grounds were well maintained and underwent little change. In 1910 a dissecting room was erected in the grounds. Previously, museum staff had dissected animals and fish in the basement and this often caused objectionable smells to permeate the concert hall. The dissecting room – a small detached outbuilding – was positioned *within the enclosure to the Caretaker's cottage, in the lower angle of the yard.* The dissecting room was built right up to the alignment with the railway land. Permission was given by the Railways Department to use the station yard land for drays to deliver and collect material. 87

Also in 1910, the cottage built as the caretaker's quarters in 1900 was extended and adapted to become the residence of a curator. This house was demolished in 1973.

Other outbuildings were added to the site, slowly at first, then more rapidly from the 1960s as the museum operations developed. The main ones are:

- An air raid shelter, built of brick with a concrete roof during World War 2 and later adapted.
- A large steel shed, built in 1968.
- The conservation buildings, built of stud construction in the 1960s and 1970s.
- The spirit store, built of brick in the 1970s.
- The education building, built of brick in the 1970s.
- The demountable building, put up in the 1970s.

The Queensland Art Gallery

The Queensland National Art Gallery came into being in March 1895. The initial small collection of art works was housed in an upstairs room in the Brisbane Town Hall in Queen Street. After ten years this accommodation became too cramped and the collection moved to a suite of specially designed rooms on the upper floor of the recently constructed Executive Building in George Street (later known as the Land Administration Building, now the Conrad Hotel). There it stayed from 1905 until 1930 when lack of space once again forced the gallery to move.

The opportunity of a new spacious gallery came when the Brisbane City Council ended its lease of the Exhibition Concert Hall.



The art gallery conversion

The change of function from concert hall to art gallery required substantial changes to be made to the concert hall. The organ had already been removed to the new City Hall; the choir platform was demolished and the raked floor raised and set level with the stage. The timber filling the two arched bays at the end of the hall was removed. The upper galleries were modified – part of the gallery floor framing was removed, along with the tiered floor, and a new floor was installed at a higher level. New timber framed walls defined a line of intimate spaces around the edges of the auditorium on two levels. New partitions for hanging art works divided the ground floor. Cross partitions were placed on the gallery to create intimate spaces for hanging smaller pictures. Providing sufficient lighting to the gallery was seen as a major problem and this was overcome ...by the erection of continuous dormer lights, set immediately below the ceiling line, on each side of the roof. **

24
The interior of the Queensland
Art Gallery soon after the
conversion. [Department of
Public Works photo 1931].



Although the Exhibition Building provided the art gallery with more space than it had before, it was not an ideal venue for an art gallery. As the state's art collection expanded the building was viewed as inadequate and agitation began for a suitable permanent art gallery. In 1947 the art critic Clive Turnball wrote of the gallery:

This ugly brick structure with bare tin roof - surrounded by iron railings like an old fashioned orphanage - is both exotic and commonplace. Inside the glaring light is wholly unsuitable for the display of pictures, and the drab walls induce an atmosphere of despair. Obviously nothing can be done with this lamentable place. The building ought to be given over to its appropriate function, the display of mangel-wurzels and the like...⁹⁰

The gallery was altered and improved in minor ways. In 1953 modern glazed doors were installed in the main entrance, replacing the original timber panelled doors. In 1962 ducted ventilation was installed, and in 1964 the south east stair was removed and the women's toilets in that



corner refurbished. In 1968 part of the upper (concert hall gallery) level was fitted out as an air-conditioned store.

The threat of roof leaks and rainwater damage to the collection during the heavy rains and strong winds of early 1974 prompted the Art Gallery to move out of the building. The collection was moved to temporary display and storage space leased in a city office building, while the construction of a new and permanent gallery was planned.

The concert hall in 1989. Note the evidence of a succession of uses: The dormer windows and flat floor date from the 1930 art gallery conversion, and the air ducts remain from a later refurbishment of the gallery, when a suspended ceiling was installed (since removed) Queensland Museum staff took over the space after 1974 and used it for storage and display preparation - you can see a prototype of the ceiling system for the new museum building at South Brisbane, used for testing and developing lighting and display systems in preparation for the move. When the picture was taken the Queensland Youth Orchestra was already using the space for rehearsals.



The concert hall wing was taken over by the Queensland Museum after the Art Gallery staff and collections moved out. With minor alterations, the space was occupied by museum staff as offices, darkrooms, store rooms and preparation areas. Much of the preparation of displays for the new South Bank museum building was done in this space.

After the museum left

Since the Queensland Museum moved out, sections of the building have been made available to various community and cultural organisations. A series of studies of the building were undertaken around 1989, as noted in the introduction, and the whole building was wrapped and fumigated with methyl bromide after West Indian dry wood termites were found.

Since the late 1980s the Queensland Youth Orchestra has been the principal user and occupant of the concert hall and exhibition hall, while the Queensland Police Pipe Band have had quarters in part of the basement. Other current users include the Queensland Municipal Choir, the Queensland Youth Choir, Bachelor Knights. The Rock 'n' Roll Circus, and the Queensland Academy of Rhythmic Gymnastics are more recent arrivals.



26 The concert hall in 1999 after conversion for use as a concert venue. The main changes visible in this picture are the new wall separating the auditorium from the foyer spaces, the new lighting and sound control room, the reconstruction of the ceiling to

blank off the dormer windows, air conditioning ducts, acoustic baffles, suspended auditorium

and stage lights.



Recent adaptation of the concert hall

Since 1996 the concert hall has been adapted in two stages, to function as a combined concert hall and drama/dance performance space. In the first stage, these were the main changes:

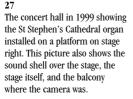
- The raked part of the timber boarded ceiling was reconstructed in the original form, covering the 1930 dormer windows (the windows were left in place in the roof).
- New side walls (east and west) were built to form a *box within a box*⁹¹ to isolate the concert hall from outside noises. These walls replace walls introduced during the 1930 art gallery conversion, but are in a slightly different position, so that they stand clear of the original posts and braces.
- At the southern end of the hall, a new wall was built as part of the box within a box, supporting a high level flat floored gallery used for follow spots, lighting control and the like.
- An enclosed lighting and sound control box was built in the original southern upper gallery.
- A new stage was constructed.



- The organ removed from St Stephen's Cathedral was installed on an elevated platform in the north west corner of the hall.
- New doors were fitted, as reconstructions of the originals, to the front entrance to the concert hall wing, and the eastern side entrance.
- A new loading dock was built, in the corner between the two wings, on the eastern side.

These were the main works in the second stage, carried out during 1999:

- The concert hall was air-conditioned
- Acoustic devices, including absorbent panels on the side walls and hung across the auditorium, were installed.
- Sound reflective panels were installed over the stage, supported by a steel framework cantilevered from posts installed in the exhibition hall.





St Stephen's Cathedral organ

At the instigation of Robin Gibson, architect for the refurbishment of St Stephen's Catholic Cathedral in Brisbane, the pipe organ from the cathedral was removed and acquired by the state government for use in the concert hall. The instrument was originally built in about 1890 by William Anderson, a Melbourne organ builder. It was stored at the Strand Theatre in Brisbane until 1921 when it was installed in the cathedral, with some additions, by B B Whitehouse. Further additions were made in 1925, and it was rebuilt in 1982. Simon Pierce dismantled and removed the organ from St Stephen's in 1988, and installed and recommissioned it in the concert hall in 1998.

The instrument, which is enclosed in its original timber casework, stands on a new elevated platform beside the stage. The platform is accessible



through a new doorway cut through the side wall of the hall, opening off a stair landing.

28
The exhibition hall in 1989, standing empty after the Queensland Museum moved to South Brisbane. The 1899 mezzanine, with its three large voids, was a light and sympathetic intrusion in the space of Addison's great open hall. The main elements of the 1899 conversion are the mezzanine, the metal ceiling and the high level windows that suffuse the mezzanine with light.



Changes in the exhibition hall

As part of the two-stage program of changes to the concert hall in 1996-99 alterations were also made in the exhibition hall. These are the main changes made in the first stage:

- A range of rooms at the south east corner of the exhibition hall were refurbished for use as offices.
- An enclosed room was formed in the central part of the hall, around the central void in the mezzanine floor, by building walls at the main level and a ceiling about the mezzanine level.





- A raised floor was built in the space between the newly formed central room and the back wall of the concert hall - this was to form a back-stage area for the concert hall.
- Toilets, showers and locker rooms were installed.

The second stage works (1999) in the concert hall also affected the exhibition hall, with the introduction of steel columns from which the sound shell is cantilevered and air handling ducts, both visible at the mezzanine level. These are shown in illustration 45 on page 57.

29
The central part of the exhibition hall after recent conversion work. The space beneath the central void in the mezzanine has been enclosed with walls below the mezzanine and with a ceiling above.





Notes

- 1 J G Steele, *Aboriginal pathways in south east Queensland and the Richmond River* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983) p. 121.
- Constance Campbell Petrie, *Tom Petrie's reminiscences of early Queensland* (Hawthorn: Lloyd O'Neil Ply Ltd., 1975) pp. 3, 27, 55, 88, 114, 118, 143, 162, 164, 169, 174, 276, 316.
- 3 Petrie, Tom Petrie's reminiscences, p. 35.
- 4 Information supplied by Gillian Alfredson, 10 August 1989.
- 5 John McClurg, *Historical sketches of Brisbane* (Brisbane: Library Board of Queensland and Royal Historical Society, of Queensland, 1975) p. 18.
- 6 Titles Office Information.
- 7 1868 Survey plan of Brisbane.
- 8 Annual Report of the Acclimatisation Society 1871, p. 7. Minutes of the Society August 1887.
- 9 *Brisbane Courier* (19 June 1871). Annual Report of the Acclimatisation Society 1871.
- 10 Annual Report of the Acclimatisation Society 1871, p. 6.
- 11 Titles Office Information.
- 12 In 1870 the membership of the Acclimatisation Society included 116 people, among whom were well-known parliamentarians, doctors, lawyers, graziers and businessmen.
- 13 Ernest A Smith, Secretary QNA, letter to the editor of the *Brisbane Courier*, 1888. Also an anonymous letter to the editor of the *Brisbane Courier*, April 1889. Both in a private clippings collection, without exact dates.
- 14 Conversation with Harold Caulfield, former Brisbane City Council Director of Parks.
- 15 The Brisbane Courier (23 October 1875).
- 16 The *Queenslander* (12 August 1876) p. 1.
- 17 The Queenslander (12 August 1876) supplement; Town and Country Journal (26 August 1876) p. 334.
- 18 Information from E Chapman & Son Pty Ltd, building contractors.
- 19 Brisbane Courier (14 June 1888).
- 20 Brisbane Courier (14 June 1888).
- 21 Brisbane Courier (14 June 1888).
- 22 Council and Executive Committee Minute Book, Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association records, John Oxley Library (hereafter RNA&IA Minutes), 18 October 1888.
- 23 The Brisbane Courier (5 July 1888) p. 8.
- 24 RNA&IA Minutes, 1 October 1888.
- 25 RNA&IA Minutes, 22 October 1888.
- 26 The Queenslander (3 November 1888) p. 791.
- 27 RNA&IA Minutes, 5 November 1888.



- 28 RNA&IA Minutes, 4 March 1889.
- 29 RNA&IA Minutes, 18 October 1888.
- 30 Brisbane Courier (8 July 1988).
- 31 The picture was given to the Queensland Art Gallery in the 1950s by H S Macdonald, presumably the architect and partner in the firm G H M Addison and Son and H S Macdonald, 1928-1940.
- 32 Brisbane Courier (14 June 1888).
- 33 RNA&IA Minutes, 3 November 1890.
- 34 The Certificate of Title records on 9 September 1892 a Bill of Mortgage to Sir Thomas Mcllwraith as Colonial Treasurer of Queensland for £30,000.
- 35 Morrison, The Aldine history of Queensland, p. 428.
- 36 RNA&IA Minutes, 1 October 1888.
- 37 RNA&IA Minutes, 6 May 1890.
- 38 RNA&IA Minutes, 1 December 1890.
- 39 *The Queenslander* (31 October 1891) p. 851.
- 40 The Building & Engineering Journal (27 April 1889) pp. 297-298.
- 41 The Building & Engineering Journal (27 April 1889) p. 298.
- 42 The Brisbane Courier (15 August 1891) p. 7: The Building and Engineering Journal (13 June 1981) p. 229: The Queenslander (4 April 1891) p. 645.
- 43 The Brisbane Courier (15 August 1891).
- 44 The Building and Engineering Journal (13 June 1891) p. 229.
- 45 The Brisbane Courier (15 August 1891) p. 7.
- 46 Building Citation, The Queensland Museum, National Trust of Queensland, 2 December 1974. This citation has since been revised.
- 47 The Old Museum Building is illustrated, as one of a dozen typical examples of the Federation Romanesque style, by Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, in *A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture: styles and terms from 1788 to the present* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994) p.116.
- 48 The Brisbane Courier (15 August 1891) p. 7.
- 49 The Building and Engineering Journal (13 June 1891) p. 229.
- 50 RNA&IA Minutes, 5 November 1989.
- 51 RNA&IA Minutes, 1 December 1890.
- 52 Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: a study of an Australian urban society* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1973) pp. 223-224.
- 53 The Brisbane Courier (15 August 1891).
- 54 RNA&IA Minutes, 17 June 1891.
- 55 The Brisbane Courier (16 December 1892).
- 56 Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s*, p. 223.
- 57 BCC information.
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- 59 Patricia Mather, *A time for a museum: the history of the Queensland museum 1862-1986* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1986) p. 25.
- 60 The Brisbane Courier (24 May 1901).
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- 62 Mather, A time for a museum, p. 9.
- 63 "First Annual Report", Transactions of the Philosophical Society, vol. 1 (1859-62).
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- 65 George Curtis Walker was a draftsman in the Public Works Department, and the design of the museum is thought to have resulted from a limited design competition held in the Colonial Architect's Office. See Donald Watson & Judith McKay, *Queensland architects of the 19th century: a biographical dictionary* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994), p. 203.
- 66 Mather, A time for a museum, pp. 14-22.
- 67 Queensland State Archives, WOR/A471.
- 68 Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *A directory of Queensland architects to 1940* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Library, 1984) pp. 160-161.
- 69 Queensland State Archives, WOR/A471.
- 70 Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the Administration of the Department of Public Works, and into all the matters pertaining thereto (Brisbane: Government Printer, 1900), evidence of A B Brady, pp. 780-795 and T. Pye, pp. 1664-1678.
- 71 Queensland State Archives, WOR/A471.
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- 75 Works Department Drawing 55-10-4.
- 76 1924 photograph JOL 21572.
- 77 Mather, A time for a museum, p. 227.
- 78 Mather, A time for a museum, pp. 73-76.
- 79 Mather, A time for a museum, p. 269.
- 80 Queensland State Archives, WOR/A 129.
- 81 Works Department Drawings, 58-10-4 & 14-15-10/2A.
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- 89 Works Department Annual Report, 1931, pp. 7-8.
- 90 The Sunday Mail (1947), undated clipping.
- 91 Old Queensland Museum concert hall refurbishment: schematic design report (Brisbane: Project Services, October 1996).