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Queensland Review / Volume 19 / Issue 02 / December 2012, pp 217 - 233

DOI: 10.1017/qre.2012.24, Published online: 12 December 2012

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1321816612000244

How to cite this article:

Bill Metcalf (2012). South Brisbane's Cultural Hub: From Post and Telegraph to Griffith Film School. Queensland Review, 19, pp 217-233 doi:10.1017/qre.2012.24

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South Brisbane's Cultural Hub: From Post and Telegraph to Griffith Film School

Bill Metcalf

Entering Brisbane's South Bank from the Victoria Bridge, we walk past the concrete 1980s Queensland Performing Arts Complex, the brick Queensland Conservatorium and the modern, glass-fronted ABC Broadcasting buildings, then past assorted cafes and pseudo-beaches until reaching the Ship Inn. Here, we enter an enclave of mid- to late-nineteenth-century architectural gems, surrounding and focusing on the small but tranquil South Brisbane Memorial Park (1923). Opposite the Ship Inn (1865), *Cumbooquepa* (1891) and South Brisbane Town Hall (1891–92), and adjoining the Maritime Museum (1881), at the eastern edge of South Bank Parklands stands a magnificent old building now known as the Griffith Film School. This building has been the cultural hub of South Brisbane for 130 years, and provides a stylish, heritage 'bookend' to today's South Bank Cultural and Educational Precinct.

When Henry Wade surveyed South Brisbane in 1842, he wisely created a large Reserve (#40) on the riverside intersection of Stanley and Vulture streets, where the low-lying alluvial river flats begin to rise over the hard rock (Brisbane tuff, or porphyry) of Kangaroo Point. While the low-lying area to the west (now South Bank) was an obvious area in which to develop wharves, this reserve was the obvious place for a dry dock because contemporary technology made it easier to excavate in rock, and be water-tight, than to try to make water-tight an excavation in soil. Nothing much happened with this reserve until January 1876, when work finally began on the South Brisbane Dry Dock.¹

To move coal from the Ipswich mines to steamships at South Brisbane's wharves and dry dock, the government decided in 1880 to build a branch railway from the Brisbane–Ipswich line, via Woolloongabba, by tunnelling to the river to create a coaling wharf under the Kangaroo Point cliffs. This railway would end at the South Brisbane Dry Dock where a passenger station would be provided. Because of this, a Post and Telegraph Office was needed at the terminus, on part of Henry Wade's reserve, beside the Dry Dock.²

Francis Drummond Greville Stanley designed this South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office. Stanley had come from Scotland in 1862, and was Queensland's Colonial Architect from 1871 to 1881, when he went into private practice. Some of his best-known surviving designs include the Queensland Club (George Street), Government Printing Office (William Street) and Saint Thomas's Church (Toowong), as well as the National Bank and General Post Office buildings on Queen Street.

Stanley's remaining buildings in the South Brisbane area include Boggo Road Gaol, Park Presbyterian Church (Cordelia Street), the Clarence Hotel (Stanley Street) and, of course, the original part of the Griffith Film School building.³

Tenders for constructing the Post and Telegraph Office were called in June 1881, and John Macfarlane became the builder. In September, the South Brisbane Dry Dock opened, followed in late March 1882 by the South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, which had cost £1915. This impressive stone building's middle floor, on the level of Stanley Street, consisted of the Post and Telegraph Office, while upstairs had three bedrooms and a verandah facing Stanley Street, and the lowest level had kitchen, dining room and servant's bedroom — for the use of the South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office's manager.⁴

When the South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office opened in late March 1881, Marion Welch was postmistress. It was uncommon for women to be put in charge of large and important Post and Telegraph Offices such as at South Brisbane, particularly when the position came with excellent new accommodation. Marion (née Wilkin) had married Edwin James Welch in 1873. He was well known as the surveyor, photographer and second-in-command of the Howitt Expedition that searched for Burke and Wills, and found their remains, in 1861. On 15 September 1861, Edwin Welch located the only survivor, John King, and took him back to Melbourne to be fêted. Welch started going blind in one eye through taking sextant sightings facing the sun. He received £200 compensation, then moved to Queensland where, in 1864, he joined the Post and Telegraph Office, with various positions including manager in Dalby and Gympie, and regional inspector. Giving the comfortable South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office appointment to his wife, Marion Welch, may have been a sop to her half-blind husband.⁵

The South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, at the rail terminus adjoining the Dry Dock and coaling wharves, and near the shipping wharves, became a bustling hub of commercial activity — but only for a few years. By 1885, a new railway line was under construction to the present South Brisbane Station, near Melbourne Street, so that became the most logical place for the South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, and it was moved in 1889. Peter James McDonald had replaced Marion Welch as South Brisbane Postmaster on 1 November 1886, but she continued to work there as a telegrapher. She might have been demoted because it appears doubtful that her husband was still living with her.⁶

South Brisbane, with a population of 25,000, had become a separate municipality at the start of 1888, and the grandiose South Brisbane Municipal Chambers (commonly known as South Brisbane Town Hall) was under construction across Vulture Street from the old (and now closed) Post and Telegraph Office. The colonial government offered this unused building for use as the South Brisbane Mechanics' Institute, and it opened as a library, reading and meeting rooms in February 1890. The Mechanics' Institute's cultural activities were meant to 'improve' the young working-class men and women of South Brisbane, and this building was well patronised. James Adams, as both secretary and librarian, lived on the top floor.⁷

Through mismanagement and the economic depression of the early 1890s, however, the South Brisbane Mechanics' Institute was bankrupt by 1893, with £400 of debt and no way of repaying it. The building (and debt) were taken over by the South Brisbane Municipal Council, which renamed the building the South Brisbane

South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, with river and chimney of South Brisbane Dry Dock in background, 1892.

Source: State Library of Queensland, image 43922.

(Colour online) Old South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, with river and chimney of South Brisbane Dry Dock in background, 2011.

Source: Photograph by author.

South Brisbane Library and Technical College, 1901, with Jubilee Wing but before addition of the Concert Hall.

Source: State Library of Queensland, image 171226.

Municipal Library and School of Arts. This became the first free municipal library and reading-room in Queensland, and soon claimed over 600 users weekly. As well, the remarkably progressive town council started the South Brisbane Technical College there. James Adams continued as librarian, and lived on the top floor.⁸

In order to house and expand both the Library and Technical College, in 1897 South Brisbane Council commissioned architect John Burley⁹ to design and build an extension, several times the size of the original building and fronting Stanley and Dock streets, to cost about £2000. On 21 June, the same day electric trams started running along Stanley Street, the Queensland Governor, Lord Lamington, laid the foundation stone while 50 men from the Queensland Volunteer Rifles formed a guard of honour.¹⁰ This Foundation Stone had an inlaid brass plate bearing the inscription: 'This stone was laid on 21st June, 1897, by the Right Hon. Baron Lamington, K.C.M.C. commemorative of the 60th year of the reign of her Majesty Queen Victoria. A. F. Luya, Mayor.'¹¹

On 16 September 1898, Lord Lamington returned to open the new extension, now called the 'Jubilee Wing', and attend a gala ball – 'the first ball in South Brisbane attended by vice-royalty'. This event was so popular that extra trams had to be provided. The newly enlarged South Brisbane Library and Technical College was illuminated with gas mantles, an option only recently having become available in South Brisbane.¹²

The newly expanded and progressive South Brisbane Technical College offered courses in painting, needlework, dressmaking, remedial classes, drawing, languages, cookery, mathematics, bookkeeping, shorthand, sanitary science and music, using

the top floor and basement. The library, on the ground floor, boasted a free reading room with a selection of 'English, American and Colonial Newspapers' and 'the most recent numbers of the leading Magazines and Illustrated Newspapers'.¹³

John Knight, an observer at the time, commented:

South Brisbane gives promise of becoming a large commercial centre. The dry dock is there; so are the extensive railway wharves and stores. The large chilling works . . . have recently opened, and having been tapped with a branch line to the South Coast railway system it may reasonably be anticipated that ere long other important industries will spring up along the route. Already a large flourmill is at work there, while in other parts of the borough jam, glass, meat preserving, clothing and other factories are springing into prominence.¹⁴

South Brisbane was growing rapidly, so in 1902 Council commissioned architect Alexander Wilson¹⁵ to design another addition to the library, a 'City Concert Hall' with space underneath for the Technical College, all on the river side of the existing South Brisbane Library building.¹⁶ This concert hall was built by Alex Gillespie, for £1700, and opened on 25 September 1902 with 'one of the prettiest and most successful balls of the season', attended by Queensland's new Governor, Sir Herbert Chermiside.¹⁷ With its beautiful 'domed' ceiling, the concert hall could seat 650 people, including 130 in the gallery, without posts to interrupt the view or dancing.¹⁸

Using the extra space underneath for lectures, and with new workshops 'with the necessary gas appliances for the trade classes',¹⁹ South Brisbane Technical College expanded to accept 116 students taking courses in plumbing, electricity and magnetism, house painting and decorating, signwriting and lettering, woodcarving, millinery, clay modelling, machine construction and drawing, as well as preparing Brisbane students for entry to the University of Sydney. Marianne Brydon became principal, the first woman to hold such a position in Queensland. She may have also lived on the top floor of the original building.²⁰

The booming town of South Brisbane, with its dynamic council, officially became Queensland's fourth 'city' in October 1903.²¹ The library and technical college were recognised as being pivotal in promoting 'the intellectual advancement of the citizens of South Brisbane'.²² By 1907, South Brisbane Technical College had over 300 students, and sought to either take over the library space or move elsewhere and expand, but neither happened because the Queensland government announced that it planned to take over all technical education, and would expand the Brisbane campus at the expense of that in South Brisbane. By 1909, all technical education had come under the control of the Queensland Department of Public Instruction, and white-collar courses had been moved to a new Central Technical College in Brisbane, with only the less prestigious, blue-collar trade courses left at South Brisbane – which nevertheless still had almost 400 part-time students.²³

Freeing up space in the South Brisbane Library building, however, facilitated the next cultural development phase. One of Queensland's best known artists, Richard Randall, whose studio was on Cordelia Street, died in 1906. One critic described 'the young native-born Queenslander, Richard John Randall' as being 'the greatest and most fecund artist Australia has ever produced — the most faithful interpreter of the beauties of the Australian Bush'.²⁴ In 1910, Randall's family offered most of his remaining artworks to South Brisbane City Council on the condition that

(Colour online) *Richard Randell (1869–1906).*

Source: H. Tardent, *The life and works of Richard John Randell*, n.p.

they create a gallery to hold and display the collection. After heated debate, the council agreed, so South Brisbane Library was removed from the upper floor, which it had taken over as the Technical College wound down and centralised. After considerable expense (£2000) to put in skylights and other alterations, the upper floor became the Randall Art Gallery and was opened on 6 July 1914 by Queensland Governor Sir William MacGregor, with great fanfare and civic pride.²⁵

South Brisbane City Council saw this as a cultural coup, or one-upmanship, over Brisbane because 'South Brisbane now occupies the unique position of possessing the only municipal art gallery in the state'.²⁶ An art critic, Alfred Wallace, described the Randall Gallery as showing the most 'wonderful collection of portrait, land,

The Brisbane Dingey Club's Annual Ball, South Brisbane Technical College, 22nd May.

'Brisbane Dingey [Dinghy] Club Ball', 22 May 1906.

Source: *The Queenslander*, 2 June 1906, 21.

and sea scape works in oils, water colours, pen, pencil, and crayon produced by one man. It seems incredible, but nevertheless such is the case.²⁷

Variously called the South Brisbane School of Arts, South Brisbane Library and South Brisbane Town Hall, with the public library, art gallery and concert hall in the same building, and with up to 500 people at a time attending vice-regal and debutante balls, cabarets, scientific lectures and demonstrations, religious and political rallies (both pro- and anti-conscription), military and patriotic functions, and university admission exams, this was truly the cultural hub of the bustling city of South Brisbane.²⁸

The concert hall was often elaborately, and perhaps garishly, decorated – particularly after electricity was connected in 1917. *The Queenslander* records a ball held there on 31 July 1924:

A network of tiny gold and purple lights was woven about the ... lamp shades which were again fringed with tiny electric bulbs. The centre of the dancing floor was occupied by an immense ball, fashioned in sections of purple and gold, and illuminated from within. Palm fronds were artistically arranged about the centrepiece, and also supported the lattice-work of butterflies and blue birds, which formed the dado around the hall. The entrance porch was beautified with a trellis of deep pink roses and a large floral-bell in the same tone was suspended above the door ... The supper-room was artistically decorated with gum boughs and pale pink roses. The tables were beautified with large paper Iceland poppies, which concealed the electric lights.²⁹

As well as the Library, Technical College and Concert Hall, South Brisbane's civic precinct included the Town Hall, Registry Office, Fire Station and, very importantly, the upmarket Ship Inn Hotel, the publican of which, John Gaffney, was also an alderman and Mayor of South Brisbane city. Because of that, many official and unofficial functions were held at the prosperous Ship Inn. It was then anything but the working-class watering hole it later became.³⁰ To complete the development of this civic cultural precinct, in 1917, South Brisbane City Council began to acquire all the triangular piece of land in the middle, to create South Brisbane Memorial Park. It was hoped by some that the park would be dominated by a prominent War Memorial Hall at the top of impressive steps coming up from Stanley Street, near the Ship Inn.³¹

All this optimistic civic development ceased when the Queensland government decided to force the city of South Brisbane, then with about 40,000 citizens, to merge into greater Brisbane City in 1925. The funds to complete South Brisbane Memorial Park were siphoned off to support ANZAC Square, and South Brisbane Memorial Park has never been completed. Even the impressive pedestal remains without a statue.³² After the new Brisbane City Hall opened in 1930, pressure arose to transfer the Randall Art Gallery there and, in spite of spirited opposition from South Brisbane residents, this occurred in 1936.³³

Richard Randall is not well known today, but in 2006 the Museum of Brisbane celebrated his work to mark the centenary of his death. Today, Randall's great-niece, Helen Duggan, keeps his memory alive, sharing her superb collection of his paintings.³⁴ Randall's studio is still in use as an art studio, but it is now in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens on Mount Coot-tha, far from its original South Brisbane home.

The cultural vandalism of removing the Randall Art Gallery at least allowed the upper level of the South Brisbane Library building to become both the ABC Radio (4QR) studio, and home and rehearsal space for the ABC (Brisbane) Studio Orchestra, in late 1936. Whenever this orchestra performed in public, more musicians were employed and it was known as the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra.³⁵

The Concert Hall was used by a wide variety of individuals, civic groups and commercial companies for balls, political meetings, plays, musical recitals and concerts, wedding receptions, school and university events and examinations, scholarly lectures, and other events. For example, on 25 May 1933, 240 candidates squeezed into the hall to sit their accountancy exams.³⁶ ABC Radio regularly broadcast (live) the ABC (Brisbane) Studio Orchestra and many other musical events from there, including such well-known musicians as Percy Grainger, and broadcast dances on most Saturday evenings. It was also the main entertainment venue for University of Queensland students, whose campus was just across the river and many of whom lived in colleges in nearby Kangaroo Point.³⁷

Various schools, such as Somerville House, as well as the University of Queensland, used the hall for exams. Meg Rayner (nee Ritchie), then a Somerville House student, remembers sitting her senior exams there in 1938 and 1939, while her husband, Sam Rayner, the well-known former Registrar of the University of Queensland, remembers sitting his university exams there in 1942. Both recall the disruptive industrial din from the busy Dry Dock next door.³⁸

During World War II, American forces occupied the top floor, and the ABC Radio and ABC (Brisbane) Studio Orchestra had to move out for a brief period,

THE QUEENSLANDER FOR SEPTEMBER 15, 1927. (PAGE 25)

A SEETHING MASS OF HAPPY MERRYMAKERS.

Children's fancy dress and poster ball held in the South Brisbane City Hall on Friday night in aid of the school funds. Scarcely has a public hall been so crowded or presented such a scene as when this care-free army of youngsters assembled for their frolic.

— Staff photo.

Children's Fancy Dress Ball, September 1927.

Source: The Queenslander, 15 September 1927, 25.

but both had returned by early 1944. The well-known Australian musician, Patrick Thomas, recalls his debut there as soloist with the ABC (Brisbane) Studio Orchestra, in November 1944. Throughout the war, the Concert Hall continued to be used almost every evening for a ball, revue, meeting or some other form of entertainment.³⁹ The Commonwealth Electoral Office continued to use the ground floor of the original Post and Telegraph Building where it had been since the early 1920s.⁴⁰

As part of this research, I interviewed a number of people with strong connections to this building. Rhonda Jurd (nee Froude) lived nearby on Vulture Street, and remembers that 'the dry docks were the place to stay away from, according to the parents, as sometimes foreign ships would come in there and the sailors would frequent the hotel (Ship Inn) opposite, so it was forbidden to go any further than the library'. She also recalls that her father taught her how to ballroom dance in the hall.⁴¹ Mary Forrest (nee Scassola) enjoyed the fancy dress balls, once 'going as a gypsy with a brightly multi-patterned skirt home made . . . and a brightly coloured top, also home made. I then wore these to school until they wore out.' Her friend attended a fancy dress ball there as 'a Hawaiian girl, covered in cocoa for a tan effect then going home after and sitting in a bath tub at about 11 o'clock at night to wash it off'.⁴² Another elderly woman recalled going there as a young girl in her pretty blue dress and, to her surprise and delight, the orchestra played *Alice Blue Gown*⁴³ as she walked across the floor.⁴⁴

In 1947, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra was formed out of the old Brisbane Symphony Orchestra, and it continued to use this building for rehearsals.

Patrick Thomas, a flautist with QSO at the time, recalls that, 'Brisbane's hot and humid summers were unbearable for QSO players, and frequently rehearsals would need to stop and the windows [be] flung open for some fresh air in the stifling, non air-conditioned Studio ... above the South Brisbane Municipal Library.' The windows could not be left open because of the noise from the South Brisbane Dry Dock. Thomas also describes 'the dense pall of cigarette smoke within the badly ventilated, non-air-conditioned studio', and musicians rushing off for a drink at the nearby Ship Inn whenever they had a break.⁴⁵

After the war and throughout the 1950s, the South Brisbane Library was the administrative and practical hub of Brisbane's entire library system, where new books were catalogued and old books repaired, and through which all inter-library loans passed. There were several attempts by the library to take over the concert hall, but stiff resistance was encountered. The library finally managed to evict the Commonwealth Electoral Office in 1952, but happily allowed the ABC studios and rehearsal space to remain upstairs at a cost of £700 per year, plus electricity. Somehow, the Queensland Patriotic Fund also managed to claim a small office in the original Post and Telegraph section.⁴⁶

A retired headmaster, Rob Simson, recalls:

My mother ... worked in her workshop under the library building repairing library books ... so they could go back into circulation (1948–1956) ... The building was very familiar to me since as a child we went to community activities there, like concerts, fancy dress balls, and more formal parties. My childhood girlfriend had her dancing classes there.⁴⁷

Barrie Hayne 'was a regular attender, often with my father, at the old library from 1947 to 1953, taking out books and magazines, and spending a good deal of time simply reading in the reference section ... The library was the first public library I had ever used; it stood me in good stead as I went on to be a Professor of English at the University of Toronto.' On a very different note, Barrie admits to 'salivating over the comic strip *Jane* who was constantly taking off her clothes in the pages of the *Daily Mirror*'.⁴⁸

Because of high demands for use of the concert hall, in 1956 a new parquet floor was laid, and 400 new chairs were purchased for £500. These 'stackable chairs had silver-frosted metal frames and deep red/maroon canvas seating and backs'.⁴⁹ On 16 February 1957, the Queensland Conservatorium of Music was formally launched, to be housed across the street in the old South Brisbane Municipal Chambers. The Queensland Conservatorium of Music first used the concert hall for a public performance on 7 November 1959, paying 4 pounds and 15 shillings.⁵⁰ To use this hall, the Conservatorium had to compete with ABC radio broadcasts, dances, debutante balls, university reviews, boxing and wrestling matches, plays, religious rallies, and numerous other events. While most events were peaceful, some turned into riots, necessitating police intervention – such as when Josef Hromadka, a Czech nationalist, addressed a political rally there on 27 September 1954 and caused 'an uproar'.⁵¹

It is important to remember that for most of its 130 years this building had a live-in caretaker. In the early 1950s, the caretaker was Les Styles, and his daughter, Pat Hunt, remembers the building as 'a real community centre ... a community hub'. As the only child living there, she would often help the librarians and play

YELLING, gesticulating interjectors brandishing placards at Dr. Hromadka at the South Brisbane Library Hall last night.

UPROAR AT TALK

FORMOSA VISIT

**U.S. chief
sees Chiang**

TAIPEH, September

BY CZECH

A PUBLIC meeting for Czech theologian, Dr. Hromadka closed in uproar last night. Czechs had heckled the visitor throughout a 40-minute address at the South Brisbane library hall.

£1069
IN THE BIG
TURF CONTEST

A 40-YEAR-OLD "dollar better" picked seven winners and a third to win £1069 1/3 in The Courier-Mail Turf Contest No. 10.

Violence at talk by Czech nationalist, Josef Hromadka, 27 September 1954.

Source: Courier-Mail, 28 September 1954, 1.

with musicians and technicians. Pat recalls hearing 'the Queensland Symphony Orchestra through the wall of my bedroom, in the Practice Studio. Rudolf Pekárek, Resident Conductor, seemed a very wild sort of man . . . I would hear him banging his baton and yelling at the players in the orchestra.'⁵² Pat also remembers 'the dry

(Colour online) Opening of Griffith Film School by Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian O'Connor, 13 March 2007.
Source: Griffith University Archives.

dock behind the library operated both day and night, with the concomitant noise and flashing arc lights from welding'.⁵³

During the 1960s, although South Brisbane Library was still busy, and the Concert Hall was heavily booked for dances, meetings, school events and amateur theatre, the building was deteriorating. Brisbane City Council, however, refused to pay for proper upkeep because it was earmarked for demolition. The building's deterioration matched the rapid downward-slide of South Brisbane. The railway lines were removed from the coaling wharves in 1960; the nearby locomotive depot and rail-yards closed in 1967–69; much of the nearby shopping precinct was destroyed in 1968–69 to build the Southeast Freeway; and in 1970 South Brisbane Dry Dock closed and much of the commercial area between the South Brisbane Library and the Victoria Bridge started being demolished to create Clem Jones Park, which later became the site for Expo '88.⁵⁴

I immigrated to Brisbane in 1970, lived in a small flat nearby and used the South Brisbane Library, by then rather rundown and with what I considered to be a very modest range of good literature. After the library closed on 17 November 1973, vandals started destroying it. In 1974, Brisbane City Council formally announced that this building would be demolished.⁵⁵ One of the reasons this never happened was because the Patriotic Fund still occupied a small part of this building and refused to leave; given the political reality in Queensland at that time, it would not have been expedient to remove them. The Patriotic Fund's logo can still be

(Colour online) *Griffith Film School 2007.*

Source: Griffith Film School booklet, 2007, p 6.

seen just inside the entrance to the Griffith Film School. By the time the Ship Inn closed in 1979, and even though the National Trust placed South Brisbane Library on its Heritage Register, this area was turning into a slum and industrial wasteland. In 1984, the Heritage Commission also placed this building on its Register of the National Estate, but it continued to deteriorate. The Surf Life Saving Association was offered a 75-year lease on condition that it spend about \$300,000 for renovations; although it moved in, the renovations never happened and the building continued its decline.⁵⁶

Everything changed when Expo '88 was announced and the money started to flow. The Expo Authority agreed to take over the building in 1986 and renovated it to become Expo offices as well as a convention venue and exclusive club, costing \$1.75 million. Unfortunately, the renovations did not respect the building's original design, and a great deal of heritage damage was done – but at least it was not demolished.⁵⁷

After Expo '88, the building was left in limbo until 1995, when the Queensland Academy of Sport occupied it and turned the concert hall into a running track! In 2004, the Queensland government sought expressions of interest in restoring and using the building, and the two parties that were both interested and financially capable were the Mater Hospital and Griffith University. Griffith University's proposal to use it as a film school was accepted in late 2004, so the university paid \$2,675,000 for the building in 2005.⁵⁸ Architect Hamilton Wilson was appointed to adapt the building to university requirements while respecting its heritage

values. He was the great-grandson of Alexander Wilson, who had designed the 1902 Concert Hall and other additions.⁵⁹

Hamilton Wilson's solution to making the 130-year-old building suitable for twenty-first century high-tech academic and creative usage was to add a section on the dry dock side, with a verandah, stairs and workrooms, making as few structural changes as possible elsewhere. This solution seems to work very well. The Queensland government contributed \$5 million to help equip the Griffith Film School, which Queensland Premier Peter Beattie opened on 13 March 2007. It had cost about \$14 million to renovate.⁶⁰

Griffith Film School now has about 40 staff and 450 students, and is the largest film school in Australia. A documentary film, *Past forward*, has recently been made by Paul Davidson, a doctoral student at Griffith Film School, about the cultural and social history of this building and its surrounds. I had the honour to be both the narrator and 'voice-over' for this film, which was based on my research. I hope this article complements *Past forward*'s visual account.

The 130-year-old South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office, also known as South Brisbane Library and Technical College, has been restored to at least some of its earlier glory, its future is assured and it continues to play a crucial role in the cultural development of Queensland. But now the 'trades' being taught are no longer dressmaking, carpentry, bookkeeping and sanitary science – but animation, cinematography, film editing and scriptwriting.

Endnotes

- 1 *Brisbane Courier* 29 January 1876: 4.
- 2 See, for example, *Brisbane Courier*, 4 June 1881, 6; and 16 July 1881, 6; *Queenslander*, 11 June 1881, 758; and 13 August 1881, 2; also R. Fisher et al., *Brisbane timeline* (Brisbane: Brisbane History Group, 1999).
- 3 D. Watson and J. McKay, *Queensland architects of the 19th century: A biographical dictionary* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994), pp. 166–78.
- 4 National Archives of Australia, J3085, 1883/5068244, 'South Brisbane Post and Telegraph Office'; M. Kennedy, *Conservation plan: Former South Brisbane Library* (Brisbane: M. Kennedy, 2005), pp. 4–9; *Brisbane Courier*, 4 June 1881, 6; and 16 July 1881, 5 and 6; *Queenslander*, 25 March 1882, 2; Report of Public Works Department for 1882; and *The Week*, 3 September 1881, 224.
- 5 *Argus*, 26 November 1861, 6; *Darling Downs Gazette and General Advertiser*, 26 June 1872, 4; *Brisbane Courier*, 6 August 1866, 3; and 31 October 1870, 5; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1916, 9; Ernest Favenc, *The history of Australian exploration from 1788 to 1888* (Sydney: Golden Press, 1888), pp. 419–24; D. Phoenix, 'John King: an Ulster explorer who became the first person to cross Australia', *Queensland History Journal* 21.8 (2012), 517; SLQ Post Office Directory, 1883. Their only child, Edwin Hardman Welch, was born 20 November 1874.
- 6 Information gleaned from various Queensland government 'Blue books', as well as Post Office Directories and electoral rolls.
- 7 *South Brisbane Municipal Council Minute Book 25 May 1888 to 27 October 1890* (Meeting 14 October 1889); *Brisbane Courier*, 16 October 1889, 4; 16 November 1889, 4 and 5; 4 December 1889, 4 and 5; and 7 February 1890, 4 and 5; and various *Post Office Directories*.

See also P. Candy, *Pioneering culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia* (Adelaide: Auslib Press, 1994).

- 8 F.J. Brewer and R. Dunn, *The municipal history of South Brisbane* (Brisbane: H. Pole & Co, 1925), p. 53; *Brisbane Courier*, 23 August 1892, 5; 6 September 1892, 6; 26 July 1893, 6; 22 June 1897, 3; and 14 May 1904, 13; and various *Post Office Directories*.
- 9 John Burley (1860–1936) was a South Brisbane architect, and this was one of his largest commissions. His design allowed for the future construction of a large Concert Hall, which occurred soon afterwards; however, it was not designed by Burley. See Watson and McKay, *Queensland architects*, p. 27.
- 10 *Brisbane Courier*, 22 June 1897, 3, 4.
- 11 *Brisbane Courier*, 22 June 1897, 3. The stone remains but the brass plaque has long since been stolen.
- 12 *Brisbane Courier*, 15 February 1898, 7; 16 September 1898, 6; and 17 September 1898, 8 and 9; *Evening Observer*, 17 September 1898, 6.
- 13 Kennedy, *Conservation plan*, p. 11; South Brisbane Municipal Library and School of Arts, *Catalogue of books in the library* (Brisbane: Cameron, Laing & Co. 1900), p. 3; and *Brisbane Courier*, 11 May 1897, 3; and 26 May 1897, 6.
- 14 J. Knight, *Historical sketch of the capital of Queensland* (Brisbane: Briggs & Morcom, 1897), p. 57. John Knight was a Brisbane journalist, editor and newspaper manager, and a founding member of the Historical Society of Queensland.
- 15 Alexander Wilson (1857–1938) had trained under F.D.G. Stanley, who had designed the original 1881–82 building, and for whom Wilson then worked as chief draughtsman. Wilson's 1902 addition to the South Brisbane Library had been provided for by John Burley's 1897–98 Jubilee Wing plans. There is no evidence to explain why Wilson rather than Burley was commissioned for the latter work. See Watson and McKay, *Queensland architects*, pp. 208–10.
- 16 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 May 1901, 10. At various times, this was also known as 'South Brisbane Library Hall', 'South Brisbane Technical College Hall', 'South Brisbane School of Arts Hall' and 'South Brisbane Town Hall'.
- 17 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 September 1902, 7.
- 18 *Brisbane Courier*, 23 September 1902, 6; 26 September 1902, 7; and 2 October 1902, 7; *The Week*, 3 October 1902, 25. See also 'South Brisbane Library (former)', report by Cultural Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Resource Management, Queensland Government, 4 April 2006.
- 19 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 September 1902, 7.
- 20 *Brisbane Courier*, 14 May 1904, 13; *Daily Mail*, 15 May 1906, 2; and 1907 *Post Office Directory*.
- 21 *Queensland Government Gazette*, 81.79 (1903), 636; *Brisbane Courier*, 6 October 1903, 2 and 6. The other Queensland cities were Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville.
- 22 *Brisbane Courier*, 14 May 1904, 13.
- 23 *Daily Mail*, 15 May 1906, 2; 20 July 1909, 2; and 31 August 1909, 6; *Evening Observer*, 16 April 1907: 3 and 5; 25 June 1907, 5; and 9 April 1908, 7; and *Brisbane Courier*, 13 October 1908: 2.
- 24 H. Tardent, *The life and works of Richard John Randall* (Brisbane: Anthony James Cumming, 1916), p. 10; F.J. Brewer and R. Dunn, *Municipal history of South Brisbane* (Brisbane: self-published, 1925); and Anon, *Catalogue of works in oils, water colours, pastels, black and white etc etc by the late Richard Randall* (Brisbane: n.p., 1933).

- 25 *Brisbane Courier*, 18 January 1910, 6; 24 May 1910, 5; and 7 July 1914, 4; *Daily Mail*, 24 May 1910, 6; 8 June 1910, 6; 2 August 1910, 5; and 7 July 1914, 6; *Telegraph*, 8 June 1910, 5; 19 July 1910, 4; 2 August 1910, 4; 7 July 1914: 5; and 14 July 1914, 4.
- 26 *Brisbane Courier*, 4 July 1914, 6; and 6 July 1914, 8.
- 27 *Brisbane Courier*, 31 January 1920, 5.
- 28 For example, see 'Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewage', City of Brisbane District 5, detailed plan #44, 2 December 1925, from Brisbane City Council Archives; and *Brisbane Courier*, 26 October 1910, 7; 16 June 1911, 7; 29 July 1911, 4; 5 December 1911, 7; 14 August 1912, 15; 15 August 1912, 15; 23 February 1915, 7; 3 May 1915, 10; 3 June 1915, 10; 12 October 1916, 8; 11 June 1923, 8; 8 October 1923, 9; and 22 October 1924, 21.
- 29 *Queenslander*, 9 August 1924, 40.
- 30 B. Metcalf, 'The Ship Inn Hotel: A story of South Brisbane and Southbank', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 20.2 (2007), 31–49.
- 31 B. Metcalf, 'South Brisbane Memorial Park', *Queensland Review* 18.1 (2011), 54–72.
- 32 Metcalf, 'South Brisbane Memorial Park', 64–8.
- 33 For example, *Brisbane Courier*, 7 October 1931, 9; *Courier-Mail*, 22 June 1936, 14; 4 October 1940, 4; and 5 December 1949, 4; *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 22 September 1936, 12.
- 34 Helen Duggan, as interviewed for the documentary film *Past forward* (2012).
- 35 *Courier-Mail*, 23 March 1937: 24, and 22 June 1937: 14; D.G. Sanderson, 'On air', unpublished manuscript (1988), presented to Institute of Engineers' Heritage Panel in August 1993, 27–8; email from Peter Roennfeldt, Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, 5 July 2012; P. Thomas, *Music in Brisbane and the QSO* (Wollongong: Wirripang, 2012), pp. 4–7; interview with Patrick Thomas, 8 July 2012.
- 36 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 May 1933, 14; *Courier Mail*, 6 November 1936, 23; 29 April 1939, 3; and 12 May 1939, 3.
- 37 *Brisbane Courier*, 27 April 1929, 14; 8 November 1929, 7; 30 October 1933, 17; 12 April 1934, 16; 29 September 1934, 10; and *Courier Mail*, 7 November 1939, 7; Thomas, *Music in Brisbane and the QSO*, p. 14.
- 38 Email from and interview with Sam and Meg Rayner in June 2012.
- 39 Minutes of Committee of South Brisbane Municipal Library and Reading Room, 10 May 1945; 12 July 1945; 12 September 1946; and 12 December 1946, held by Brisbane City Council Archives (#BCA0794); Kennedy, *Conservation plan*, p. 38; interview with Patrick Thomas, 8 July 2012.
- 40 *Queenslander*, 21 October 1922, 31; *Courier Mail*, 11 December 1936, 23.
- 41 Emails dated 19 June 2012 and 14 August 2011.
- 42 Emails dated 20 and 21 June 2012.
- 43 *Alice Blue Gown* was written in 1919 for the Broadway hit musical, *Irene*, and made famous by singers such as Frank Sinatra. Probably the most touching of the lyrics for my informant would have been: 'In my sweet little Alice blue gown/ When I first wandered down into town/ I was so proud inside/ As I felt every eye/ And in every shop window I primped, passing by.'
- 44 Email dated 22 August 2011.
- 45 Thomas, *Music in Brisbane and the QSO*, pp. 14, 38. The 45-member QSO's first public performance was on 27 March 1947 at Brisbane City Hall.

- 46 Minutes of Committee of South Brisbane Municipal Library and Reading Room, 10 February 1949, 9 March 1950, 13 December 1951, 13 March 1952 and 18 December 1952, held by Brisbane City Council Archives (#BCA0794).
- 47 Email dated 16 November 2011.
- 48 Emails from Barrie Hayne, 7 August 2011 and 20 June 2012.
- 49 Email from Pat Hunt, 18 June 2012.
- 50 Email from Peter Roennfeldt, 18 June 2012; and Department of Education letters dated 5 October and 11 December 1959, held by Peter Roennfeldt.
- 51 Minutes of Committee of South Brisbane Municipal Library and Reading Room, 15 September 1955; 15 March 1956 and 21 November 1957; held by Brisbane City Council Archives (#BCA0794); *Courier-Mail*, 23 March 1946, 6; 24 July 1946, 3; 17 September 1946, 5; 25 June 1949, 3; 2 November 1949, 9; 15 November 1949, 5; 1 August 1950, 7; 3 November 1950, 8; 12 April 1951, 5; 6 March 1952, 3; 21 November 1952, 6; 2 January 1953, 7; 18 September 1953, 3; and 28 September 1954, 1.
- 52 Pat Hunt (nee Styles) in an email dated 7 September 2011, and as interviewed for the documentary film, *Past Forward* (2012).
- 53 Email from Pat Hunt, 18 June 2012.
- 54 Minutes of Committee of South Brisbane Municipal Library and Reading Room, 20 April and 25 May 1961, held by Brisbane City Council Archives (#BCA0794); also R. Fisher et al., *Brisbane Timeline*, Brisbane: Brisbane History Group, 1999.
- 55 'Closure and Demolition of South Brisbane Library', memorandum dated 28 August 1973, Department of City Administration, held by Brisbane City Council Archives.
- 56 *Courier-Mail*, 14 June 1986, 16.
- 57 *Sunday Mail*, 15 March 1987, 15 (magazine); and 3 April 1988, 79; and *Courier-Mail*, 15 April 1987, 11; and 29 April 1988, 78.
- 58 Griffith University Archives, file 08/05/0078-01, letters dated 9 February 2005, 23 March 2005, and 16 December 2005; and *Courier-Mail*, 12 November 2004, 10.
- 59 *Courier-Mail*, 7 April 2007, 32. See also Kennedy, *Conservation plan*.
- 60 Interview with Professor Marilyn McMeniman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Griffith University, 12 April 2011; and Ministerial Statements, Hon. P.D. Beattie, 11 November 2004 and 14 March 2007.