

## TOWN HALL

116 Brisbane Street, Ipswich

### Former Names:

Town Hall, Mechanics' School of Arts



*The Town Hall is the building on the right.*

### History

A meeting held on 31 July, 1850 resolved 'that the present state and position of this rapidly increasing town make it desirable to establish a public institution for the supply of news and the diffusion of knowledge generally'. The same meeting formed the 'Ipswich Literary Institution', its aim to provide a news room and library, with lectures on local politics but not religion. Six days later another meeting established a School of Arts committee, merging with the Library Institution, for the purpose of obtaining the colonial Government subsidy paid to School of Arts. In 1858 the colonial Government was asked to grant land for a permanent School of Arts, and the site of the old Court House and lock-up in Brisbane Street was chosen. The foundation stone was laid on 8 February 1861 by Governor Bowen, who opened the first section on 24 October. This first section consisted of the 'hall and classrooms' built at a cost of £150, and much of the cost had been raised by donations of money and labour. The anticipated 'elegant extension' was added in 1864, taking the building to the Brisbane Street frontage.

Meanwhile in 1860 the Ipswich Municipal Council had applied to the Government for a grant of land on East and Roderick Street for a Town Hall and a depot for tools and other equipment. This request was granted in 1861, but a further request for money to build the town hall was refused, and the ratepayers likewise refused to contribute in 1862. In 1863 the Council decided to ask the School of Arts committee to make an addition to its building for town hall offices. A period of financial difficulty for the School of Arts ensued and finally in 1869 the control of the School of Arts property was transferred to the Council, although Title did not pass to the Council formally for another 25 years. When the Council took over the property it included two allotments of 32 perches each, fronting respectively Brisbane and Limestone Streets, a two storeyed brick building fronting Brisbane Street, and a brick entertainment hall and a cottage fronting Limestone Street. The Council became one of the tenants in the building, moving there in 1869.

Following the death of Governor Blackall in 1871, a memorial committee presented a turret clock to be erected on the School of Arts building, necessitating the construction of a tower which was essentially installed by the beginning of 1879. In that same year a fountain and column to commemorate Blackall was instead erected at the nearby intersection of Brisbane and Nicholas Streets. The memorial clock was later removed to the former Council Chambers at Sandgate, after the neighbouring Ipswich Post Office clock tower was built. The Ipswich City Council eventually outgrew its accommodation in the building and erected new premises in South Street.

The School of Arts building was converted to various office and retail uses, with changes being made to the hall's interiors for those purposes. A mezzanine floor now occupies much of the original tall space of the hall, and some modifications have been made to its doors and windows.

### Description

The School of Arts façade fronting Brisbane Street is an 1864 two-storied brick building with elaborately decorated render finish, and a now blank clock tower. The large double-height hall behind dates from 1861, with recent modification. It extends more than halfway back towards Limestone Street, and the fall in ground level there affords a third storey at the southern end. The hall is rendered

brick, with an unpretentious elevation of rendered string courses and round or segmental headed window openings on the sides and a hipped corrugated iron roof with small gabled roof vent. The Brisbane Street façade is richly decorated in classical detail with semi-circular headed openings on each storey, three grouped in the centre façade and one each side on the slightly projecting wings. The lower storey has a rusticated stone plinth and recessed course joining in the plaster work. The upper storey has plaster decoration and elegant Ionic piastres and half columns supporting a rich entablature surmounted by a pierced pediment and a short square former clock tower. This tower has pediments on four sides, and features Corinthian pilasters. The detailed faced treatment returns for some distance on the eastern and western sides facing the adjacent buildings.

The recessed central bay of the ground floor front, opens on to a porch from which doors open on each side into offices on the Brisbane Street frontage. A central doorway serves the internal anteroom serving the hall beyond and containing a fine staircase leading to the upper rooms. An upper room served as the former Council Chambers now much altered. Doors and windows are mainly original cedar joinery except for the three central openings facing Brisbane Street on the first floor which contain steel framed windows and glazed doors leading on to a shallow balcony. Early illustrations show this building as having apparently polychrome colouring on this elaborate façade.

The stylistic eminence of the building, and its affinity with the two adjacent buildings, contributes an important streetscape quality to this part of Brisbane Street.