

Heritage Architecture

SCHOOL OF ARTS



THE BUNDABERG SCHOOL OF ARTS

Schools of Arts were important features of the cultural life of nineteenth century Australia. They usually housed a subscription library, reading room, museum, meeting rooms and rooms for lectures, debates and technical classes. They were a focal point in the social, educational and cultural life of the town.

Thus it was for the Bundaberg School of Arts.

The idea of a School of Arts was developed by Dr George Birbeck, who established what he called a Mechanic's Institute in Glasgow, Scotland in 1802. This was aimed at improving the education of working men and women, to assist them in developing greater expertise and improved employment prospects. This stemmed from a growing middle class ideology directed at self-improvement. It was felt that this would lead to greater industrial efficiency and productivity, through exposure to lectures on topics ranging from science, literature and history, to applied arts. Basically, they offered Adult Education.

The building of the School of Arts in any settlement was an indication of civilization. To recognize the social and education worth of the Schools of Arts, the government encouraged their establishment by making land available, subsidizing the purchase of books, and assisting with the cost of the building.

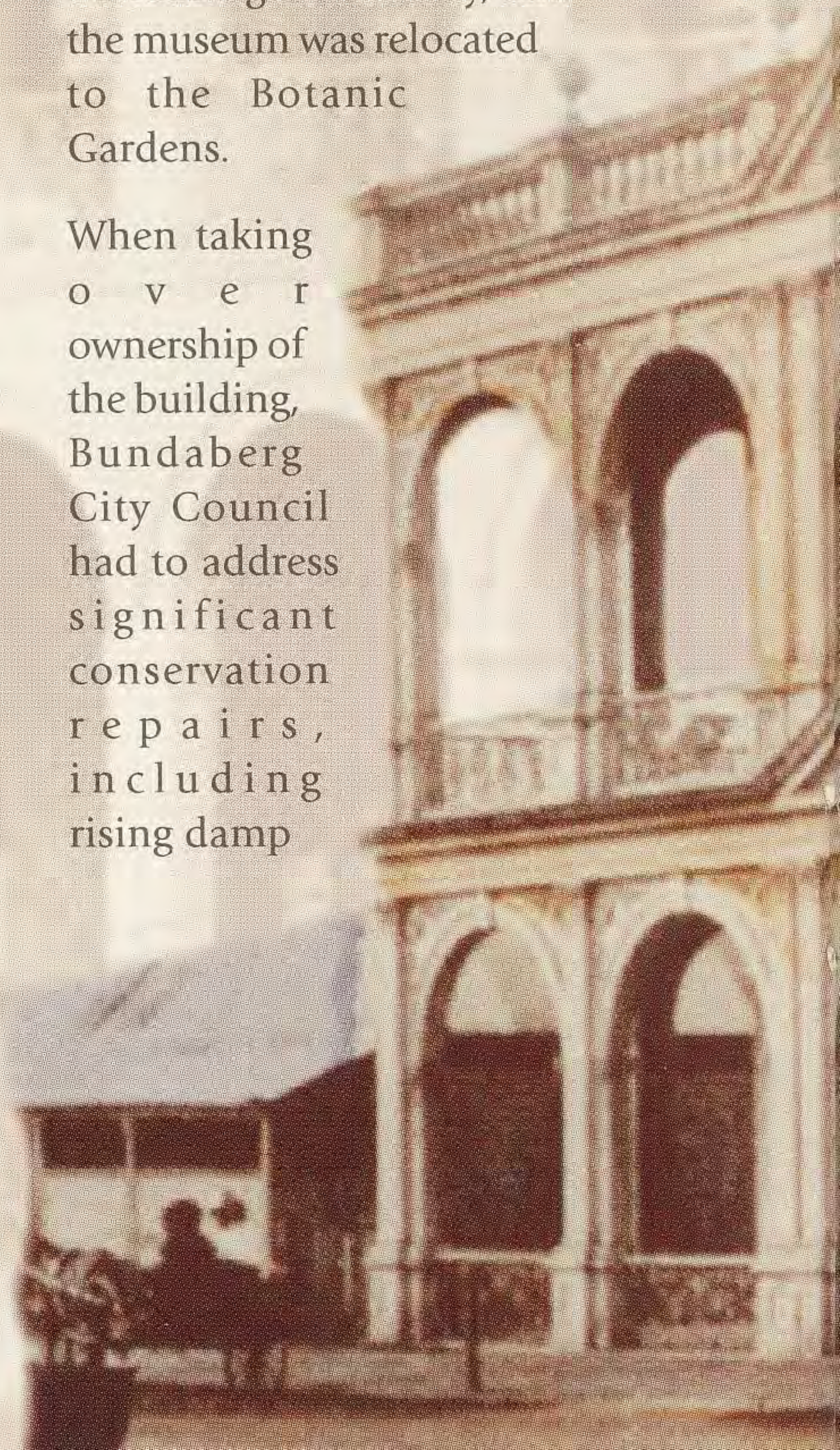
The Bundaberg School of Arts building at 184 Bourbong Street, was built in 1888. The building was designed by the architect Anton Hettrich. It is the third School of Arts building to occupy the site. Builder William Calvert commenced construction in June 1888, and the building took nine months to complete at a cost of \$3,300.

The building is listed by the National Trust of Queensland as a significant building in terms of its heritage to not only Bundaberg, but the State of Queensland. It is a fine example of the high Victorian Italianate style of architecture, with decorative cast iron, grand archways and generous arcading and verandahs. It is a substantial two storey building with rooms off both sides of a central hallway, which extends the length of the building to a large curved staircase leading up to the first floor. A number of rooms on the eastern side of the ground floor were available for rent to persons or firms, to provide a steady income for the school. On the western side a large room with a mezzanine housed

the Subscription Library, and behind was the Committee Room. The first floor was dominated by a Reading Room and a Natural Museum, and Chess Rooms were in the remainder.

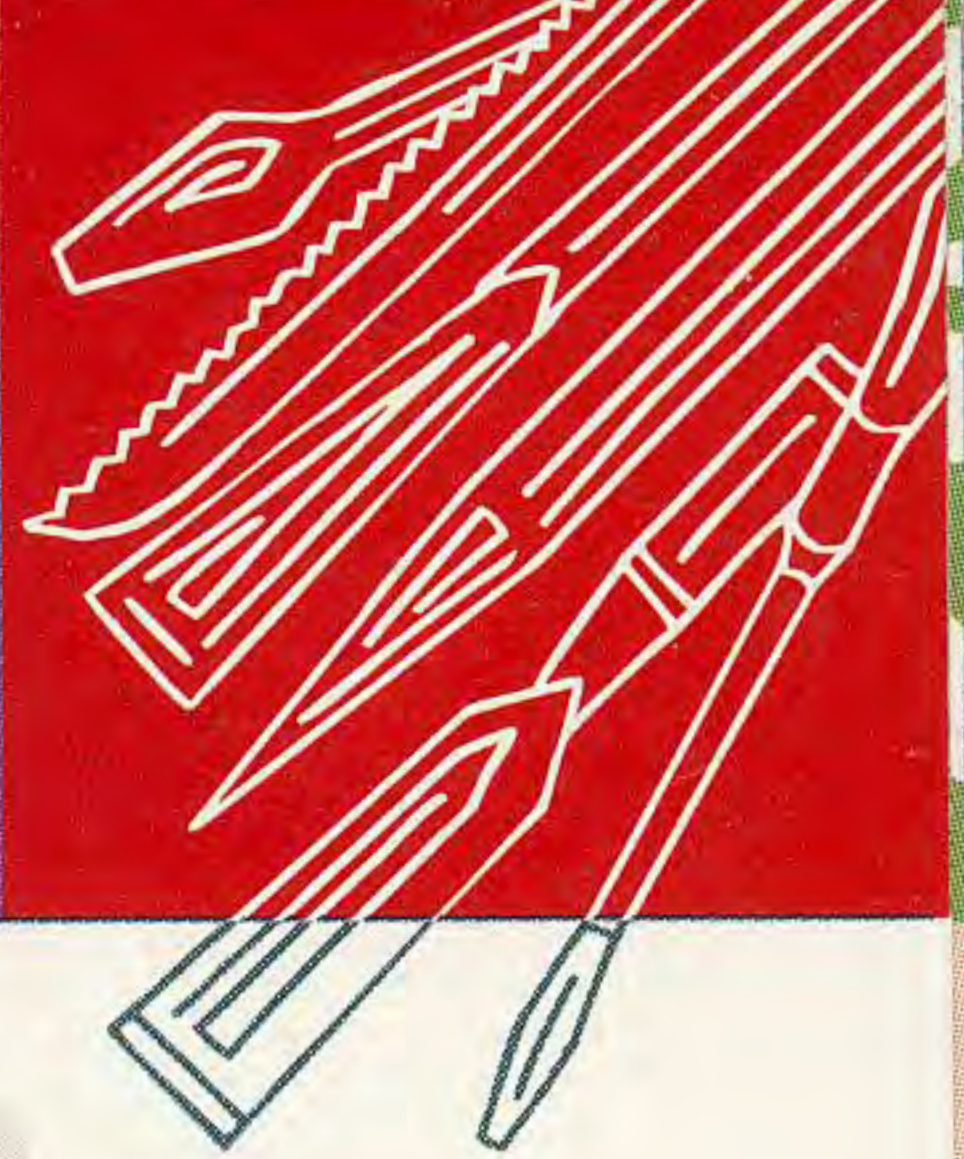
The structure operated as a School of Arts until 1979. The Bundaberg City Council then assumed control of the building, and established the Bundaberg Public Library in the former Customs House and Commonwealth Bank building, on Quay Street in 1981. The School of Arts was then occupied by the Bundaberg Arts Society, and the museum was relocated to the Botanic Gardens.

When taking over ownership of the building, Bundaberg City Council had to address significant conservation repairs, including rising damp



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and rainwater penetration. In addition, issues such as disabled access had to be incorporated within the constraints of budget, while at the same time meeting the requirements of the National Trust.

Today, the School of Arts provides evidence of customs and ways of life in Queensland history, relating to education and standards which no longer exist. It has played and continues to play a prominent role as a meeting place and a point of focus for the Bundaberg community, and as such, is important to the cultural history of Bundaberg.

Currently, the School of Arts is occupied by Bundaberg Community Development, the Art Society and a real estate agency. It is not only one of the oldest surviving public buildings in Bundaberg, but also one of the most enduring and successful School of Arts buildings in Queensland.

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REFERENCES

Allom-Lovell-Marquis-Kyle Architects, 1993, 'Bundaberg School of Arts Conservation Study'.

