

# SPRING HILL SERVICE RESERVOIRS



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*

These unassuming structures located behind the Old Windmill Tower in Observatory Park played a vital role in the provision of fresh water to Brisbane from 1871 until decommissioned in 1962.

In 1863 Brisbane Municipal Council adopted a report by civil hydraulic engineer Thomas Oldham for a long-term solution to supplying water to the city's rapidly expanding population. The proposal involved the damming of Enoggera Creek, in the current suburb of The Gap, with gravity feed reticulation to the city and a service reservoir near the top of Windmill Hill (Wickham Terrace). This was a farsighted scheme to provide 12 months' water supply to 200,000 people – five times the population at the time.

### Construction commences

Construction of the dam began in 1864. By early 1867 Brisbane Town had a reticulated water supply which was extended to South Brisbane in 1870. However, the mains did not supply the elevated areas and the Water Board decided to construct a small service reservoir near the observatory.

Tenders were called for the construction of the reservoir in either concrete or brick. The first contractor began in concrete, changed to brick but did not complete the contract. The Water Board decided to complete the structure under the supervision of its Clerk of Works.

**Did you know?** 69,000 bricks were purchased to construct the first reservoir. When complete, it measured 18x9 metres. It held 570,000 litres of water, 4.1 metres deep. The outer walls were 35 centimetres thick and the interior was divided into nine squares by arched brick walls.

On 24 February 1871 the reservoir was completed and filled with water. It was filled for 10 hours every evening to supply the stored water throughout the township the following day. The site was fenced and an inspector's cottage constructed nearby to maintain water quality.

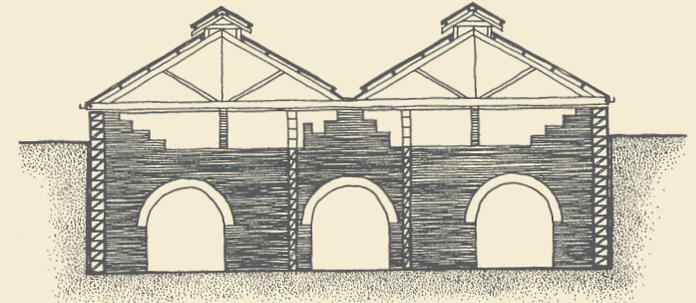
### Extensions to meet growing demand

Although the reservoir provided a much-needed boost to the town's water supply and reduced residents' water charges, some areas of Fortitude Valley remained without a reliable supply. In December 1872 the walls were raised another 60 centimetres to increase the reservoir's capacity. In 1876 an additional water main was laid from Enoggera Dam, allowing the extension of reticulation to the higher parts of the town, and providing a more reliable supply to those already connected.

In 1882 a second, much larger reservoir was built to meet the needs of the increasing population and the Water Board continued with other projects to guarantee water supply for the growing township. Larger mains brought more water directly from Enoggera Dam and a new dam at Gold Creek constructed in 1885.



▲ Reservoir interior



▲ A cross-section of the second, larger reservoir, 1882

### Leaking issues

The Water Board was concerned about the possibility of animals falling into the reservoirs as they were unroofed but they were more concerned about leakage. In 1889 the small reservoir was cleaned, painted and cement washed on the inside and clay puddled on the outside, but continued to leak. From 1898 to 1906 the reservoirs were taken out of use, although the larger one was kept full in case of an emergency.

### Roofing the reservoirs

In the early 1900s the tanks were brought back into service to assist with the still increasing demands of the city. Both reservoirs were roofed, nearby grapevines and a mulberry tree were removed to avoid root damage to the walls, and the internal walls of the smaller reservoir were cement rendered to prevent leaking.

In 1910 the new Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board abandoned the composite main from Enoggera Dam dating from the 1870s because it frequently burst. Routine maintenance was undertaken on the reservoirs and in 1928 control over Brisbane's water supply and sewerage was given to the recently amalgamated Brisbane City Council.

## Reservoirs decommissioned

In 1962 the main from Enoggera Dam collapsed. As the reservoirs played only a small role in supplying the city and could not service the new high-rise buildings, they were decommissioned on 3 September 1962.

**Did you know?** The first reservoir, fencing and inspector's cottage cost £1,700. The second reservoir cost £2,797. At the time the average annual wage was £100.

## Restoration and the future

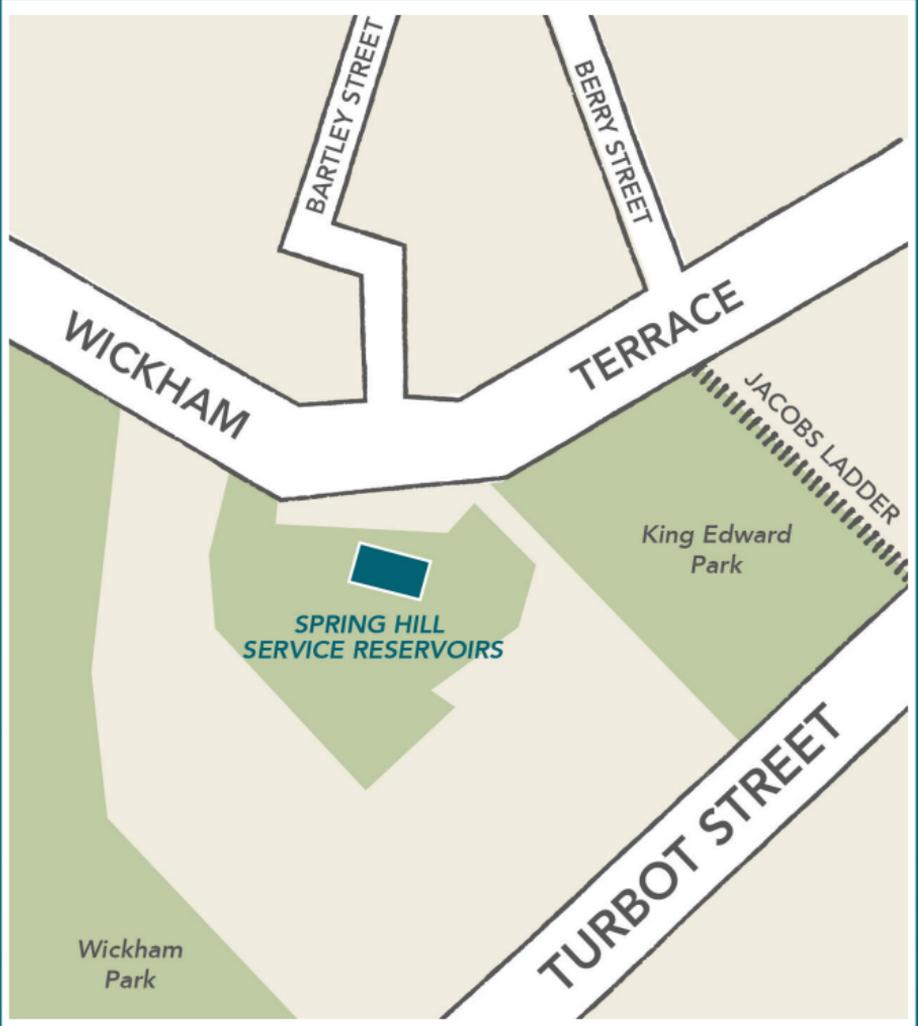
During the 1980s conservation work concentrated on the nearby Old Windmill Tower.

Council has received a variety of suggestions for reusing the reservoir buildings, including museums and restaurants, however, poor access, fire risk and ventilation issues have hampered potential redevelopment. Restoration work was undertaken in 2009 as part of Queensland's 150th anniversary celebrations. This work, which included the replacement of the roof, has increased the potential for public access. The use of the large reservoir as an underground venue for opera was the first test of sensitive reuse for the reservoirs, and the first time the public has been able to access this space – constructed more than 130 years ago to store water for Brisbane.



▲ Reservoir exterior

## Location Map



Brisbane City Council plays an important role in identifying, documenting and protecting Brisbane's heritage, including more than 2000 heritage places across the city – from convict-era buildings to statues, bridges and trees.

You can explore some of Brisbane's hidden secrets with Council's self-guided heritage trails.

Visit [www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/heritagetrails](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/heritagetrails) for more information or to download trail brochures.

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