

## WILSON ARCHITECTS



Left: Residence of J.W. Hayne in Yeronga [architect A.B. Wilson, built c.1889], Brisbane, c.1921. [Negative no. 78770](#)  
Right: Home, also known as Lamb House, Kangaroo Point [architect A.B. Wilson, built c.1902], Brisbane, c.1904. [Negative no. 60681](#)

Established in Brisbane, Wilson Architects was founded by Alexander Brown Wilson in 1884. He had immigrated to the young city with his family from Scotland in 1864, aged 7 years. He joined the Buildings branch of the Department of Public Works in 1875, eventually becoming a junior draftsman and the protégé of Colonial Architect F.D.G. Stanley. Wilson gained proficiency in the architectural styles of the day, working with Stanley on projects such as the Lytton Battery. When Stanley left to establish a private practice, Wilson joined him as principal draftsman.

Still not a fully qualified professional, Wilson returned overseas to gain his qualifications. He passed the examination to be admitted to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1884, returning home as the only Queensland member of RIBA. Later the same year, he established his own practice in Queen Street. An opportune time as Brisbane was in the midst of wave of new development. Wilson designed many of Brisbane's grand early houses, as well as commercial and Church projects. By the late 1880s, he had undertaken 115 commissions firmly establishing him as one of, if not the, preeminent architects of colonial Queensland.

Most of the work disappeared in the early 1890s with a deep economic depression gripping the eastern states, followed by the devastating flood in Brisbane in 1893. Unlike many others, Wilson managed to survive taking on any work he could, mostly repairs and minor projects, with his family helping out making and selling jam, collecting bottles and even gathering leeches for local physicians. While the city recovered from the depression by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Wilson's practice resumed activity, it was nowhere near the output of earlier years. He was supported through his association with families such as the Morricks, who co-owned the Rankin & Morrow biscuit factory at North Quay, and the Siemon family.

Alex Wilson produced some of his best work during this pre-First World War period, including 'Home' or Lamb House at Kangaroo Point, the Queen Anne-style mansion currently under renovation. He went on to lecture at the Central Technical College, became a life member of the Queensland Institute of Architects which he helped found, and was on the committee to report on a site for a new Brisbane Town Hall. When Alex Wilson retired from practice in 1928, his son Ronald Martin took over the business.

Ron, who was far more educated than his father, continued the firm as R. Wilson Architect and Architectural Engineer, later becoming R. Martin Wilson & Son when his son Blair joined the firm. He narrowly survived the Great Depression and went on to design many buildings in Brisbane and regional Queensland, including Gatton's School of Arts and South Brisbane's Cliffside Flats, which still stand and are heritage listed. He worked for the Allied Works Council during the Second World War and when conditions for construction improved in the 1950s, Wilson designed the Presbyterian Church at St Lucia, of which he was a founder. Ron Wilson retired at 70, supporting his son Blair in practice from 1956. Ron died in July 1967.



Left: Construction of the St Lucia Presbyterian Church [architect R.M. Wilson, built 1952], Queensland, n.d. [Image no. 6523-0001-0341](#)

Blair Wilson had spent time studying in Britain, touring Europe with his fiancée, and brought new insights and ideas back with him when he joined his father's practice in 1956. His early projects included the Greek Orthodox Church in South Brisbane and the Stanthorpe Civic Centre and Library. He continued the firm as Blair M Wilson after his father's death. Blair decided to undertake further study in university planning, taking a course at the University of York. While in Europe he attended a short course in Finland where he heard an inspirational address by Alvaar Aalto, the influential architect and designer considered the father of mid-century modernism. Blair Wilson went on to design many buildings in Queensland, including the iconic La Boite Theatre at Petrie Terrace, Australia's first purpose-built theatre-in-the-round and one of the first buildings at Griffith University's Nathan campus, the School of Science.

Right: Albany Creek Crematorium at Bridgeman Downs [architects R.M. Wilson & Son, built 1964], Queensland, 1966. [Image no. 6523-0001-0610](#)



In 1995, Blair handed the reins of the business to the fourth generation, his second son Hamilton. Blair passed away in 2014. The practice is still in operation today.

### Collection resources

- [28203 R. Martin Wilson & Son architectural drawings 1960-1963](#)  
This collection of architectural drawings, plans and sketches relate to various projects in Brisbane and Stanthorpe. One drawing, signed B.W. (Blair Wilson) was labled "Awards in Architecture 1966. The Residence of the Year – Moxon Residence, Ormiston." Others were for proposed buildings at Brisbane Markets (Rocklea), Albany Creek Crematorium (Aspley), and a Civic Centre in Stanthorpe.
- [OM92-102 Martin Wilson clippings 1926](#)

This clipping book, consisting of two volumes, likely belonged to R. Martin Wilson just prior to becoming a partner in his father Alexander Wilson's architectural practice in 1928. It contains newspaper clippings of various contemporary buildings and landmarks around Brisbane [FURTHER RESEARCH REQUIRED].

- [Brisbane Grammar School, Gregory Terrace: landscape study 1992](#)

A report undertaken by Wilson Architects.

- [Clifford House Toowoomba: report on the garden 1994](#)

Report undertaken by Wilson Architects

- [Newstead Park conservation study report \[draft\] 1995](#)

Report undertaken by Wilson Architects

### Other collection resources

- [La Boite Theatre with Blair Wilson](#) **digital story** (2014)

This digital story, made to complement State Library's major exhibition *Hot Modernism* in 2014, features Blair Wilson discussing the design process, elements of the design and various aspects of the ground-breaking and award-winning La Boite Theatre, built in 1972. Blair passed away months later.

- [Hamilton Wilson: Next generation learning spaces](#) **lecture** (2011)

Hamilton Wilson, the current managing director of Wilson Architects discusses the Brisbane Grammar Schools' integrated learning facility, the Lilley Centre, which was selected by the OECD Centre for Effective Learning Environments' international compendium on innovative learning spaces. This lecture was delivered as part of State Library's APDL (Asia Pacific Design Library) Lecture Series.

### Blog

- [Vale Blair Wilson](#) (2014)