

# Nerang Police Lock-up

LHR0078

## Place details

Address/location	Country Paradise Parklands, 68 Billabirra Crescent, Nerang
Title details	25SP281398
Principle period(s)	ca. 1912 - 1987
City of Gold Coast division	5
Other known names	Old Nerang Gaol
Area for protection	Building
Place components	Building
Place category	Building
Context	Relocated three times (1987, 2010, 2015). Conservation works 2015.
Other listings	
Register entry date	5 June 2018

## Statement of heritage significance

The Nerang Police Lock-up is a place of local heritage significance for its historic importance, rarity, potential to yield information and class characteristics as evidenced by, but not exclusive to, the following statement of heritage significance, based on criteria (a), (d), (e) and (g) of the Gold Coast Local Heritage Register.

### Criterion (a) Historic importance

The Nerang Police Lock-up is associated with the development of Nerang as an important population and administrative centre for the South Coast, (now known as the Gold Coast). As the population and commercial activity increased in the district there was a requirement for a local policing presence. Prior to establishment of a police barrack and associated lock-up in Nerang, law enforcement operations for the district were based in Beenleigh.

The two-cell lock-up is representative of the early form of small scale gaol building constructed by the Queensland Police throughout regional Queensland. It was used as a temporary holding facility for offenders waiting to be tried by the Police Magistrate or, in more serious cases, those being transferred to the criminal courts in Beenleigh or Brisbane. The kinds of offenses that resulted in time in the lock-up varied from petty thievery, disturbing the peace and absconding from hired service, to more serious crimes such as violent assault and murder. It also housed those who were unable to pay their fines and those suspected of suffering from mental illness.

An example of prisoner graffiti can still be seen today in one of the cells.

### Criterion (b) Rarity

The Nerang Police Lock-up is one of two remaining Queensland Police purpose built unattached holding cells on the Gold Coast, the other being the Tallebudgera Police Lock-up which is on static display at the Gold Coast Hinterland Heritage Museum in Mudgeeraba. The lock-up demonstrates the past custom of including a small scale temporary stand-alone holding facility at police station sites to manage offenders until such time as they could be dealt with. This custom is no longer practiced by Queensland Police.

### **Criterion (d) Class Characteristics**

The Nerang Police Lock-up is largely intact and represents a law enforcement function that has been important in the history of the Gold Coast. Intended to only hold a few prisoners at a time, the lock-up is a simple design with a single secure door entry to each cell, two high-set barred apertures in each cell and rudimentary facilities for the occupants. This simple design demonstrates the principal characteristics of early Queensland Police temporary gaol facilities.

### **Criterion (e) Aesthetics**

The Nerang Police Lock-up evokes a strong emotional response associated with incarceration and law enforcement practices from the past. The functional design of the lock-up with a lack of features for the comfort of occupants imparts a vivid impression of the conditions that would have been experienced by occupants.

### **Criterion (h) Special association with particular person or organisation**

The Nerang Police Lock-up is an important extant building which demonstrates the history of policing in Nerang. It has a strong association with the Nerang Police Station having provided a secure facility for the short term management of prisoners for many years. The establishment of a local police station in Nerang brought with it a sense of security for the community and was part of the evolution of policing in the district providing for the development of a safe and modern society. A police station at Nerang has been a part of the community since 1874 and the growth of this service over time parallels the growth of the Nerang and district community as a whole.

## **Image**



Nerang Police Lock-up, Country Paradise Parklands. Image courtesy of City of Gold Coast.

## History

The history of the Nerang Police Lock-up is closely tied to the history of Nerang and the permanent policing of the township and surrounds. It is one of the oldest buildings in Nerang.

The township of Nerang, then known as Bingarybar, was surveyed by Martin Lavelle in 1865 and the first government auction of land occurred in September the following year.<sup>1</sup> Initially there was little interest in the surveyed township, with only three of the forty town lots offered for sale sold at the reserve price to a single purchaser, Benjamin Bathurst.<sup>2</sup> Although the head of navigation for the Nerang River, the township of Nerang did not develop until road connections were improved in the first years of the 1870s, offering better distribution access for goods sent and received by river and more reliable connections.<sup>3</sup>

Two hotels were opened around the same time in the district; Benjamin Cockerill's *Nerang Hotel* in early 1872 at Benowa and Charles Weinert's *Southern Cross Hotel* in July 1872 at Nerang.<sup>4</sup> In February 1873 Cockerill transferred the license for the *Nerang Hotel* to his newly established *Royal Mail Hotel* in Nerang.<sup>5</sup> In late 1873 Cobb and Company diverted their thrice-weekly coach service from Coombabah away from Benowa to Nerang providing a further catalyst for the town's development.<sup>6</sup> Pimpama storekeeper Theodore Lenneberg, who subsequently moved to Nerang, opened a branch store in early 1874 and, following appeals in the newspapers at the time, the Nerang Creek Post Office, formerly located in Benowa, moved into his store in February that year.<sup>7</sup> Tenders to run the mail from the Tweed to Nerang were also called during 1874<sup>8</sup> and by August that year Nerang was being described as a 'thriving place' with principal industries of timber-getting and sugar growing.<sup>9</sup>

With the growth of Nerang in the early 1870s the need for a local police presence was recognised and in early 1874 the Queensland Police established a police barracks and lock-up at the settlement. An existing building, located on a low bank of the Nerang River in what is now Bischof Pioneer Park, was converted and used as a barracks and courthouse for sittings of the Police Magistrate's Court and Court of Petty Sessions.<sup>10</sup> Newspaper reports note that a lock-up was the first new building to be built at the Police Station.<sup>11</sup>

Brisbane-based Senior Constable Peter Burke arrived in February 1874 to take charge of the newly established Nerang Police Station and was appointed Clerk of Petty Sessions in March 1874.<sup>12</sup> Cases were heard by a visiting Police Magistrate from Beenleigh or, in their absence, local Justices of the Peace, such as Theodore Lenneberg and the sugar planters, Robert Muir and William Philpott.<sup>13</sup>

The duties of police personnel during this period in a rural district such as Nerang were varied. They were required to patrol a large area on horseback, keeping the peace and checking licenses. They also acted as inspectors of slaughterhouses and labour agents.

In February 1875 problems with the location of the police station became apparent when the station was inundated during heavy flooding of the Nerang River, an unwelcome event for the newly arrived Senior Constable Peter Burke and his family. Reports on the flood noted that the Nerang River flood waters had risen six feet above the floorboards of the Police buildings carrying away loose items such as books and furniture with doors being forced open by the strength of the flood waters. The forge store was all but destroyed, the horses were required to be turned adrift and some of the outbuildings carried away. It was commented that Senior Constable Burke and his family barely had time to escape the rising waters.<sup>14</sup>

Concerns about flooding, inconvenient location and inadequate space, with sittings of the court being held in the constable's office, were being raised as early as 1876 and in July 1878 the Legislative Assembly of Queensland allocated the sum of £250 (approximately \$36,892 today) for a new courthouse at Nerang.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these problems, and the availability of funds to remedy the situation, the police station remained as it was and in use. An 1884 letter to the Inspector of Police from Sergeant Ballantine, who was in charge of Nerang Police Station, indicated that the 'old' lock-up was still in use and described it as rather small and the building old' and mentioned that the site of the lock-up was 'flooded about seven years ago'.<sup>16</sup> Ballantine also notes in this letter that 58 prisoners were confined to the Nerang lock-up during 1883.

Around 1885 the Police Department purchased a house and land in Price Street from Theodore Lenneberg. Lenneberg had moved to Southport to take over the ownership of the *Southport Hotel* and the property was his former residence.<sup>17</sup> The site of the new Police Station consisted of three lots with frontages to both Price and Cotton Street. As before, it functioned as both courthouse and barracks.

In 1886 plans for a new police station were drawn up by staff of the Colonial Architect and tenders subsequently called for its construction.<sup>18</sup> Plans to build a new police station, including a new lock-up, initially raised some degree of agitation amongst the citizens of Nerang as it was believed that School Reserve lands may be taken for the purpose of this construction rather than using the Price Street land acquired in 1880.<sup>19</sup>

The new police station was built adjoining the existing station in Price Street and had an office and living quarters for the Non-Commissioned Officer or Constable In-Charge. The building work was completed by February 1887 with the existing station building retained for use as the courthouse and quarters for married constables, and later, single men. Both buildings faced Price Street. At the rear of the expanded police station were stables and earth-closets.<sup>20</sup>

The plan drawing for the new building indicates that the new Police Station would incorporate two lock-up cells in one of the building wings.<sup>21</sup> This layout fits descriptions of the building given in papers from 1900 and 1903 where the building is described as having three rooms, kitchen, office and two cells or six rooms plus two cells.<sup>22</sup> These cells were later converted into a bedroom and dining room/kitchen.<sup>23</sup> Mention in official papers of there being a detached lock-up with two cells and verandah does not occur until 1912.<sup>24</sup>

The Nerang Police Lock-up was used as a temporary holding facility rather than a permanent jail. It held people waiting to be tried by the Police Magistrate or those being transferred to the criminal courts in Beenleigh or Brisbane (and later, occasionally, as temporary accommodation for persons to be transferred to Southport lock-up). It also housed those who were unable to pay their fines. The kinds of offenses that resulted in time in the lock-up varied from petty thievery, disturbing the peace and absconding from hired service, to more serious crimes such as violent assault and murder. People suspected of being mentally ill could also be brought to the lock-up until they could be assessed by a doctor for possible transfer to an asylum.

Conditions in the detached lock-up were primitive. There were no windows, just two high-set barred apertures in each small cell (one above the door and one high in the back wall) for ventilation. In the early 20th century, an electric light was installed on the verandah, and this was the only illumination available. Some inmates whiled away the boredom by scratching graffiti on the wooden walls, and evidence of this can still be seen today.

The 1886/87 buildings, along with original converted house, remained in use for many years, although termite attack and peeling paint were ongoing problems. By the early 20th century, it was no longer up to modern expectations of comfort and resident officers were complaining of primitive amenities and a poorly designed warren of rooms that were particularly inconvenient for married officers and their families. The change in police transportation from horses to the motorcar meant that the stables became redundant and, although they found some use as storage space and a garage for officers' cars, the buildings began to deteriorate.<sup>25</sup>

In the early 20th century development of the coastal strip overtook that of the hinterland areas and Nerang remained a small rural community. In 1908 Southport was declared a district for a Court of Petty Sessions and during the 1920s most policing matters were transferred to Southport. Nerang Police Station was reduced to a single officer station and the courthouse and single men's quarters were no longer of use. In 1930 these were purchased by D. McKenzie and removed from the Price Street site.<sup>26</sup>

In 1928 the lock-up was described as being very old but serviceable.<sup>27</sup> It remained in use although by the 1940s prisoners were transferred to Southport 'as early as practicable'<sup>28</sup> and by the mid-1960s almost all prisoners were being taken directly to the Southport watch house.<sup>29</sup> Maintenance and repairs were undertaken as required on the lock-up and in 1963 it was described as being in good condition.<sup>30</sup>

Approval to build a badly needed new residence was obtained in 1940 however building restrictions during and immediately after World War II delayed construction until 1956.<sup>31</sup> The new residence, which is still extant today,

was a modern high-set building with police office underneath. The old residence was sold and removed from the site although the lock-up remained.<sup>32</sup>

In 1963 application was made to have the cell bars of the lock-up covered with wire gauze in compliance with Queensland Police General Instructions No. 1703 to prevent the use of the bars in suicide attempts.<sup>33</sup>

From the 1970s the Nerang district underwent a development boom, leading to a need for a stronger police presence and in 1988 a new modern police station was built at the rear of the reserve.<sup>34</sup> This is the current station facing Cotton Street.

The lock-up, which by now was used only for storage, was ear-marked for demolition as part of the construction of the new Nerang Police Station. The station's then Officer-in-Charge, Len Reynolds, prevented the demolition and organised for the former lock-up to be donated to the Albert Shire Australia Day Foundation (now Gold Coast Australia Day Foundation) and the building was moved to Council land at Carrara in late 1987.<sup>35</sup>

The former lock-up spent some years within the grounds of Carrara Sports Stadium where it was planned to restore the building as part of a proposed 'bush town' complex.<sup>36</sup> In 2009, with the impending development of the stadium complex, the lock-up was temporarily transferred to Heritage Park at Pimpama until a suitable permanent display location could be found. In 2015 the lock-up was returned to Nerang and, following conservation work, is now on display at Country Paradise Parklands.<sup>37</sup>

## Description

The Nerang Police Lock-up is a small two-cell timber chamfer board building with a small front verandah. It retains many of its original features. Two heavy three panel doors lead off the verandah into each cell. Each door retains a lockable hatch located centrally in the door and a heavy bolt locking system. There are no windows, just two high-set barred apertures in each small cell (one above the door and one high in the back wall), and holes drilled into the ceiling for ventilation. In the early 20th century, an electric light was installed on the verandah (now removed although hole for electrical cabling remains), and this was the only illumination available. Some inmates whiled away the boredom by scratching graffiti on the wooden walls and an example can still be seen today in one of the cells.

The gabled roof is continuous over the verandah and is supported with chamfers verandah posts. The verandah also has decorative scalloped vertical timber detailing to the upper sides between the building and termination of the verandah roof.

The lock-up has had a number of paint schemes over its life. Study of the remnants of old paint layers revealed that it was once light green, a colour typical seen in the 1920s, then mushroom pink, and later cream.

Conservation work was carried out on the lock-up in 2015 following relocation of the building to Country Paradise Parklands, Nerang. Although structurally sound, repairs to many of the timber components of the lock-up were required. The roof, guttering and down-piping were also replaced. Timber stairs to the front verandah were installed and the lock-up repainted in a scheme reminiscent of colours commonly used in the 1880s. The timber stairs have since been replaced by a ramp which provides access not only the lock-up but also two other nearby buildings.

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