



Official Opening of the refurbishment of the St George Courthouse

Monday, 26 March 2007 at 3:00 pm

St George Courthouse

The Terrace, St George

**Judge Marshall Irwin
Chief Magistrate**

I am delighted to be with you here today for the official opening of the redevelopment of the St George Magistrates Court.

As Chief Magistrate of Queensland one of the most enjoyable aspects of my role is being able to visit and on some occasions conduct courts around the state.

It gives me an opportunity to find out first hand the issues that are emerging in our courts across Queensland. It also gives me an opportunity to experience Queensland outside of the south east corner of our state.

The St George Courthouse has been serving the community for more than 130 years – from dispensing justice and car registrations to hosting local balls.

The courthouse was constructed by town builder Arthur Macalister and opened in 1870.

The first registrar and police magistrate was Reginald Charles Heber Uhr and as is the case with many buildings in regional Queensland extensions were added to the building in 1876, 1912, 1920, 1928 and 1938.

I am sure many of you would remember former magistrate Ian Rose who retired last year and who joins us today. For much of his time, Ian says the monthly call over in St George was quite a community event.

The general call over here would often continue until seven at night, which meant the verandas were overflowing with people, including plenty of young children.

Non-profit organisations would set up a large tent to provide non-alcoholic refreshments for everyone, so it was almost a carnival atmosphere, notwithstanding the circumstances.

According to Ian, St George was probably the noisiest court in Queensland, with the boisterous chatter and constant drumming of feet running along the verandas.

Despite the hustle and bustle outside, the court has always gone about its business in a quiet, professional manner, without undue drama or fanfare.

Although this busy building was structurally sound, it no longer met the contemporary needs of staff or the general public.

I am pleased that characteristically the Director-General of the Department of Justice and Attorney General, Jim McGowan and the Court Administrator, Paul Marschke quickly acted on my submissions about the need to redevelop this court after we had all visited it- and this brings to the present day.

The new layout, which I'm sure you will agree looks quite wonderful, was designed by Project Services, a division of the Department of Public Works, and constructed by Carmichael Builders from Dalby.

Most of the original VJ timber and French doors have been retained and, where possible, new materials have been incorporated to complement the building's classic style.

The refurbishment has not only modernised the old courthouse and provided the facilities essential to administration of justice in the twenty-first century, but substantially restored its heritage value.

It is also worth acknowledging that courthouses, as well as being fine examples of colonial construction and design are somewhat of a hub for the communities they serve.

It is something we don't often get the chance to reflect on. As well as their judicial function, courthouses throughout Queensland do have another role within the community.

They are the place you get a copy of your birth certificate or have a JP witness your land title documents and even cast your vote at an election-and where you can obtain a myriad of other services.

The new facilities will better serve court users, magistrates, staff and the St George community. I look forward to visiting this redeveloped St George Courthouse well into the future.