Engineering Heritage Australia

Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse

Rockhampton

Queensland

Rockhampton turntable and roundhouse, c 1968 Bill Blannin

CEREMONY REPORT

On the presentation of a

ENGINEERING HERITAGE MARKER

on

30 April 2026

at

Rockhampton Railway Workshops

Prepared by Stuart Wallace
Engineering Heritage Queensland

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1. Introduction

Eleven people attended a ceremony on 30 April 2026 at the Rockhampton Railway Workshops to unveil a marker and Interpretation Panel awarding an Engineering Heritage Marker to the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse. The roundhouse is located in the workshop precinct and will be integral to the development of a community-focused Heritage Precinct.

The ceremony was organised by the Transport and Main Roads Queensland (TMR) who are the owners of the Workshops and Engineers Australia Queensland Division. Representatives of these organisations together with the State and Local Government members attended.

2. The Invitation and Run Sheet

2.1 Details

Location; 380 Bolsover Street, Rockhampton.
Onsite contact; Erin Schrauwen (TMR) 0434 557 560

2.2 Background Information

Engineers Australia (EA) has awarded Transport and Main Roads (TMR) an engineering heritage marker for the Roundhouse contained within the Rockhampton Railways Workshops Rejuvenation precinct.

The Roundhouse was built in 1914 and is the only full circle roundhouse built in Queensland reflecting the importance Rockhampton railways in the development of the region and serving as far west as Longreach. Throughout its history it has evolved to match technological changes and continues to evolve now as part of a rejuvenation project.

TMR arranged the event in consultation with EA and they invited state and local government representatives. No press representatives attended.

2.3 Attendees included;

Name	**Title and responsibility**	**Organisation**
Stephen Kelly	A/Executive Director, PRS	TMR
Aldwin Quizon	Project Director, Rockhampton Railyards	TMR
Erin Schrauwen	Senior Communications and Engagement Advisor	TMR
Aliya Westaway	Principal Advisor	TMR
Darren Beattie	General Manager	Engineers Australia
Stuart Wallace	EA Heritage Queensland	Engineers Australia
Stephan Connor	EA Rockhampton Regional Group	Engineers Australia
Donna Kirkland, MP	Member for Rockhampton	Local State Member
Marika Taylor	Division 7 Councillor	Rockhampton Regional Council

2.4 Run sheet

Time	Action	Person responsible
2:30PM	Rockhampton MP, Donna Kirkland, Engineers Australia and TMR representatives arrive at Rockhampton Railyards.	Erin Schrauwen
2:40pm	Engineers Australia present award and provide overview of why the Roundhouse was selected.	Stuart Wallace
2:50	TMR representative accepts the award.	Stephen Kelly
2:50	Unveiling of Information Panel	Representatives from EA and TMR
2:55pm	Photo opportunity with attendees in front of information panel	All
3:00pm	Unveiling event concludes	
3:00pm	Site tour of Roundhouse. All site tour attendees to sign in before entering site. TMR provide Engineers Australia and Rockhampton MP a tour of the Roundhouse. Aliya leads tour.	Aldwin Quizon
3:30pm	Site tour of Roundhouse concludes.	

3. Presentation by Stuart Wallace

3.1 Introduction

This effort was initiated by members of Engineering Heritage Queensland which is part of Institution of Engineers Australia now referred to as simply Engineers Australia.

It was decided in 2015 to investigate nominating the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse as part of the Engineering Heritage Recognition Program and I put my hand up to do the background research because I had been involved with the design and refurbishment of railway maintenance facilities in Australia and internationally and importantly also, in 1992, I was part of a study to turn two of the segments of the roundhouse into a child-care facility so I had some firsthand knowledge of the building.

3.2 What is a roundhouse?

A railway roundhouse is a building that was commonly used throughout Australia (and other parts of the world) in the days when steam locomotives were the primary source of motive power. When a locomotive required maintenance, it was moved onto a turntable surrounded by work bays radiating off the axis of the turntable forming a circular building called a roundhouse. Most "roundhouses" did not form a full circle, typically being a semicircle or perhaps three quarters however the roundhouse here in Rockhampton was one that did indeed form a complete circle and is one of only two in Australia surviving to this day; the other being in Junee in New South Wales.

The Roundhouse is a legacy of the way Queensland developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with a series of ports up the coast serving the hinterland and, in this case, the port at Rockhampton serving an area as far west as Longreach and railways were integral to this development. Initially, the Queensland government of the time, wanted to build a railway to connect Rockhampton to Brisbane but the locals objected because they could see that their economy would benefit more by connecting and developing westward to Longreach. Thus, Rockhampton became the epicentre of a large and growing regional railway system with its own administrative centre, General Manager and Divisional Engineers. The steam locomotives of the day required frequent servicing and

the state-of-the-art roundhouse that is the subject of this nomination was constructed in 1914 and superseded a smaller one built only a few years before.

As railways evolved over subsequent years, so did the roundhouse. The incredible feature is not only that it is a rare example of a full circle roundhouse but that it remains generally intact to this day and is a worthy reminder of how important railways were to the development of Queensland in general and in Rockhampton in particular.

3.3 What is this roundhouse like?

In October 1909, estimates and plans were prepared for a new roundhouse with triple the capacity of the existing building. Drawings were prepared by the Chief Railway's Engineer for additional workshop buildings constructed as part of the redevelopment of the site in conjunction with the roundhouse, including the blacksmiths' shop and the machine shop.

This new locomotive roundhouse was opened in late 1914, while work continued on the rest of the workshop buildings. The building consists of 52 radial bays within seven segments of a complete circle; each segment having seven or eight bays. It occupies an area of nearly one hectare in total with over half under cover. Each segment is separated from each other by brick walls and each bay is supported on four round timber poles approximately 300mm in diameter and the roof and wall construction is of sawn timber. The use of round poles for the columns (basically trees) was a common Queensland Rail practice including for bridges whereas many other railways would dress the timber to a square or rectangular cross section. Cladding to the roof and walls is in corrugated galvanised steel although there is evidence that the original roof cladding was in asbestos cement shingles.

Located centrally and enclosed by the roundhouse is a turntable 18.3m in diameter which enabled each engine to be “spotted” into the radial stall required for washing out the boiler or for necessary repairs, while it also protected the engine and workers from the weather. Each stall had a concrete floor with rails and pits to enable access under the locomotive. The roundhouse featured five entry and exit tracks (called “roads” in railway parlance) leading from the central turntable to the depot yards.

Whilst the roundhouse was intended as a servicing and preparation area for locomotives, tinsmiths and coppersmiths were also accommodated in bays not needed for locomotives. This adaptation was unique in the Queensland experience as all other roundhouses constructed were utilised as steam locomotive sheds only.

Milled timber was supplied from the North Ipswich Railway Workshops and bricks for construction of piers and to divide off locomotive segments were most likely supplied from Mount Morgan brickworks. The whole of the roundhouse was illuminated with electricity which was a very modern feature in 1914.

3.4 This is not what was built in 1914!

Throughout its life of over 100 years, the Roundhouse has been at the centre of a railway that has experienced significant technological change and the Roundhouse itself has undergone modifications to match. In addition, because of its age and construction materials, changes over the years have taken place simply as part of routine maintenance.

The central point of the roundhouse, the turntable, was replaced in 1953 with a new turntable bridge capable of handling locomotives with heavier axle loadings. In the mid-1950s the locomotive storage capacity of the Rockhampton depot was further increased when a special purpose steam shed

was erected for the use of longer Beyer-Garratt locomotives which exceeded the length of the turntable.

In the early 1950s, new technological motive power was introduced onto Queensland Railways when the first diesel-electric locomotives (DEL) arrived and the first DELs to be based at Rockhampton were in 1966 for use on export coal traffic. The diesel-electric locomotives were serviced at a separate location in the Rockhampton yard but with their introduction, withdrawals of steam locomotives took place and the final steam locomotive was overhauled in Rockhampton Workshops in 1969.

Following closure as a steam locomotive depot, the roundhouse was then used as a wagon repair and maintenance centre from 1969 until 1988. In 1983 an office for sub-foremen was also built into one of the stalls in the roundhouse and in 1988 one of the bays was converted into a store area for breakdown equipment. The roundhouse was utilised as a wagon repair shop until 1990. In 1992-3 an administration complex was inserted into two segments and other uses such as a child care facility were investigated.

The railway workshops continued to function as an operational railway workshop maintaining and repairing railway rolling stock however, in the years from about 2017, the then owner, Aurizon, commenced a review of their maintenance requirements generally and the Rockhampton facilities came under review and were downgraded. The roundhouse remains today as a surviving infrastructural element of the steam era on Queensland Rail and as part of the adaptive working environment of the railway workshops. Now, as owners, Queensland Transport & Main Roads (TMR) has developed a Heritage Precinct Master Plan to celebrate and preserve the rich rail history of the site, including the Roundhouse.

4. Heritage Listings

The proposal to seek Engineering Heritage recognition was accepted by EHA on 16 March 2016. The concept of having a railway locomotive maintenance facility centred on a turntable is unique to the railway industry but within the industry itself, was not remarkable and at the end of the day, such facilities, even a full circle facility, can only be described as a large circular tin shed. However! There are significant reasons why it has gained recognition for Engineering Heritage listing as described below.

4.1 Historical Significance

Already recognised under State Heritage legislation, the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse also demonstrates a continuum of significant engineering activity being integral to the development of railways in central Queensland for over a century. The railways around Rockhampton were initially developed as a system isolated from other railway systems in Queensland and thus the workshops at Rockhampton and the Roundhouse in particular, became the focal point for the maintenance of steam locomotives and other rollingstock. As the Queensland system and technology evolved, the Roundhouse similarly evolved to suit contemporary needs and retained its pivotal role, keeping in mind that throughout its history, rail-based systems represented the state-of-the-art transport mode, particularly for long haul and heavy haul services prevalent in the region.

Starting in the late 19th century the railways were a catalyst for the development of Rockhampton as an important port serving the region and particularly the west. Being a part of the very fabric of the developing population centre, the railway workshops and roundhouse were a major employer and added significantly to the local economy.

4.2 Historic Association

The impact of railways on the economies and societies of the 19th century and into the 20th century was very significant. They provided connectivity, faster communication and ease of getting primary production to market and the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse was at the centre of this revolution and ongoing evolution in central Queensland. The need for the large circular roundhouse was precipitated by the success of the railways in the Rockhampton region and as the various networks in Queensland were subsequently integrated.

4.3 Creative or Technical achievement

Roundhouses were utilised for the erection and maintenance of railway locomotives and rollingstock for several decades before the subject roundhouse was commissioned; in fact, it replaced a similar but semicircular facility. However, as locomotives became more powerful, they became longer and heavier and the subject roundhouse reflected these developments when compared to other roundhouses including the one it replaced. In addition, as the fleet size increased on the system, the roundhouse designs increased from semicircular, to two-thirds to the ultimate but relatively rare, full circle as we see in Rockhampton

When constructed, roundhouses represented best practice in locomotive maintenance and a comparatively rare full circle roundhouse demonstrates applying this best practice to a very large fleet. Subsequently, roundhouses lost favour to the more space-efficient linear "running sheds" meaning that not many more roundhouses were constructed after 1914. This applies worldwide and not just to Queensland or Australia and the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse represents the pinnacle of roundhouse technology in Queensland.

4.4 Social/Cultural

The railways played a major role in the development of Rockhampton and the workshop complex, of which the Roundhouse is a part, has been a significant source of employment in the community for over 100 years. From a relatively slow beginning when the railway stretched only 50km as far as Westwood, the Central Railway centred on Rockhampton expanded west, north and south and connected mining and primary industries to population centres and ports on the Fitzroy River. As the railway grew so did the facilities to service it, including the Roundhouse, and as such, became such a large employer in Rockhampton that the term 'a good job in the railway' was coined. Research reveals that perceptions of a job there as being 'good' derived from not only the terms and conditions of employment but also extended into the socio-cultural realm, where mateship, pride in trade and perceived valued service to the State contributed to both work satisfaction and notions of identity.

It could be said the roundhouse was the most easily identifiable structure within the workshops complex and the one the community identifies with the most.

4.5 Rarity

The Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse is significant as the only full circle roundhouse ever constructed in Queensland. It is also the last remaining structure of its type in Queensland (full circle or otherwise) and it is a significant and rare example of this type of structure; the only other full circle example still extant in Australia being in Junee in New South Wales.

Specifically,

- It provides physical evidence of a technology developed to erect, service and maintain railway locomotives that was utilised in the later part of the 19th century but which became obsolete in the second half of the 20th. Importantly and despite this, it demonstrates how support facilities evolve to meet current needs of an industry.

- Operating steam locomotives are now a rarity and demonstrating how they were maintained in operational condition to suit traffic demands of the day is even rarer but easily demonstrated by the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse. When viewed, it is not difficult for the layman to envision how a locomotive would be brought into the Roundhouse, spotted into a maintenance bay and worked on above and below rail by a skilled workforce totally unaffected by weather.
- It is the only one of its exact type ever built in Queensland and is the only Roundhouse type structure still in existence in Queensland.
- It was built to serve a large and expanding fleet of locomotives and benefited from experience of building and operating other similar but smaller structures locally and elsewhere in the State. However, within less than a decade of completion, the concept of a roundhouse was superseded by a linear running sheds because of more efficient space utilisation and throughput. Consequently, the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse demonstrates the pinnacle of roundhouse development.
- Transportation is at the forefront of human activity and the Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse epitomises how maintenance of a major transport mode was undertaken from the early 20th century and supported population growth.

4.6 Representativeness

The Rockhampton Railway Roundhouse is a significant element of the development and decline of the steam locomotive as a mode of traction power for Queensland Railways in the years 1914-69. The roundhouse was a purpose-built building designed for the storage, servicing, and running maintenance of steam locomotives allocated to the Central Railway (later Division) based on Rockhampton.

The building is significant as the only full circle roundhouse ever constructed in Queensland for the use of steam locomotives and as one of the last two surviving examples of such a building in Australia.

5. Acknowledgements

Engineers Australia acknowledges the support, contribution and agreement with Queensland Transport & Main Roads (TMR) for recognising the engineering heritage value of the Rockhampton railway Roundhouse and for the erection of the Interpretation Panel and marker.

Engineers Australia wishes to acknowledge the work of Stuart Wallace (of EHQ) who undertook the research and drafted the Proposal, the successful Nomination and the design of the Interpretation Panel and Michelle Cook of EA Queensland for organising the ceremony and liaison with TMR. In this process, Allan Churchward of EHQ was also of great assistance.

Engineers Australia also acknowledges the important contribution and support from TMR staff for the ceremony.

6. Photographs

Photo 1. Stephen Kelly of TMR making the introductions

Photo 2. Stuart Wallace of EHQ explaining the Engineering Heritage significance of the Roundhouse

Photo 3. L to R. Stephen Kelly (TMR), Marika Taylor (Local Member), Darren Beattie (EA), Donna Kirkland (State Member) & Stuart Wallace (EA)

Photo 4. TMR and EA. L to R; Aldwin Quizon, Stephen Kelly, Darren Beattie, Stuart Wallace & Stephen Connor