

Howard Smith Wharves

5 Boundary Street, Brisbane

In a bid to save money, the Howard Smith Wharves were constructed between 1934 and the early 1940s in conjunction with the Story Bridge. The projects were a Queensland Government initiative to provide relief work during depression years in the 1930s, but also to provide critically important infrastructure for the city.

Navigational hint: the wharves are on the outside bend of the river under the Story Bridge.

Initially known as the Brisbane Central Wharves, these were leased by the Australian coastal shipping company Howard Smith Co. Ltd and became known as the Howard Smith Wharves from the mid-1930s. At its peak, the company was one of the largest and most successful shipping enterprises in the Port of Brisbane.

In the Second World War, Brisbane was the United States' largest naval base in Australia and civilian safety was addressed with an air raid shelter construction program. With no shelters, the Waterside Workers' Federation called for air raid shelters on the wharves, noting that wharf workers were doing their best for the war effort and should be afforded some protection.

Brisbane City Council built five air raid shelters for the Bureau of Industry (a Queensland Government agency) between 1941 and 1942 near the Howard Smith Wharves, as there was a substantial workforce there and the Story Bridge was seen as a prime target in wartime. Of the 5 shelters, 3 were 'pillbox' types built at many places throughout Brisbane. The other 2 types of shelters were constructed of large stormwater pipes, an unusual air-raid construction style for Council at the time.

In 2009, an adaptive re-use development was proposed for the wharves, comprising 3 distinct precincts: a hotel and tourist precinct; a restaurant, commercial and entertainment precinct, and an outdoor recreational zone boasting community facilities to cater for local residents. The redeveloped Howard Smith Wharves site was opened in late 2018 and has become a popular riverside precinct.