

William Jolly Bridge

Between North Quay and Grey Street (near Stanley Place)

The William Jolly Bridge was originally known as the Grey Street Bridge. It was constructed following the formation of the greater City of Brisbane in 1925 and has 3 major spans and spectacular arched ribs rising through the deck. It was hailed at the time as 'the largest reinforced concrete bridge in the Southern Hemisphere and one of the largest in the world'. Evans Deakin & Co Ltd fabricated the steelwork that was encased in Gunitite, a sprayed dry mix concrete and relatively new technology that would also be used later in construction of the Cairncross Graving Dock.

Navigational hint: travelling upstream from Southbank, the William Jolly Bridge is a distinctive cream-coloured bridge with 3 spectacular arched ribs.

Designed by engineer Alison Eavis Harding Frew, the bridge was to be a Brisbane landmark. M.R. Hornibrook Ltd commenced bridge construction in August 1928 after its winning tender of £384,850, (\$35,010,955); however, the total cost would eventually be substantially more at £674,526 (\$61,363,648).

In The Telegraph, March 1930, Hornibrook noted that, “the bridge would rank next to the Sydney Harbour Bridge among Australian bridges. However, there was far more civil engineering involved in the Grey Street Bridge than in the Sydney bridge.

With such a lengthy construction timeframe and complex engineering, problems were inevitable. In July 1930, construction halted due to one of the most unusual fires in Brisbane history. The fire started 100 ft (30.48 m) below the Brisbane River surface in one of the bridge airlocks. While the workmen managed to quickly reach safety, it was several hours before the fire was extinguished.

The bridge was officially opened on 30 March 1932 by then Governor, Sir John Goodwin, 11 days after the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The grand opening was attended by a huge crowd and some people climbed the arches for a better view. For those who could not attend, the event was described over the radio on station 4QG.