

## LOCAL EVENTS The view from here: The photographic world of Alfred Elliott 1890-1940

Museum of Brisbane, City Hall  
13 February - 30 August, Free



Words and Photographs by Jeanete Zanotto

The year was 1895, the equipment a wooden bellows camera, the operator a humble 26-year-old clerk trying out a new hobby.

Could Alfred Elliott ever have imagined that the series of shots he took from the observation deck of the Old Windmill would one day be stitched into a giant panorama covering an entire wall of an exhibition dedicated to his work?

Elliott's images of life in early Brisbane include street scenes, trams, bridges and government buildings, a Royal visit, the Botanic Gardens and family outings to the Glasshouse Mountains.



This was no mean feat considering his tailboard camera would have been difficult to carry about and slow to set up. Instead of film, a gelatine silver-bromide emulsion was applied on glass plates, which were adjusted forward and backward until the image became sharp. The emulsion was light sensitive, allowing a negative to be produced.

"Glass-plate negatives are hard to look at – small, fuzzy and the tones are inverted," an exhibit notes. "Yet when printed they can produce amazing images. Large-scale modern reproductions reveal details captured on the glass-plates, not possible with the technology available in the late 1800s and early 1900s."

Elliott (1870-1954) has been hailed for his role in documenting social history over 50 years, in capturing a "Lost Brisbane", and as Brisbane's answer to Chicago street photographer Vivian Maier.

Like Maier, who was unknown and unpublished in her lifetime, Elliott's work only came to light in 1983 when a collection of glass plate and film negatives was found stored in cigar boxes under a house in Red Hill. It received a limited showing before part of the collection was lost and forgotten in museum archives.

Museum of Brisbane curator Phil Manning, who found the missing box of 400 film negatives that helped flesh out Elliott's life and make a major exhibition viable, told [theweekendition.com.au](http://theweekendition.com.au) he hoped it would "prompt us to consider what perspective our own photographs, if found in 100 years, would convey about the history of the city".

On show are 50 images produced from the 285 glass plate and 400 film negatives found. The exhibition also features Elliott's stereographs, produced by a camera with two lenses projecting onto a single plate of glass, which offer visitors a 3D view of early Brisbane.

Free Curator's Tours will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> of May and 2<sup>nd</sup> of August. ■

Further reading:

<http://www.museumofbrisbane.com.au/whats-on>  
<http://www.museumofbrisbane.com.au/blog/stereographs-the-original-3d-technology/>  
<http://theweekendition.com.au/the-locals/phil-manning/>

