



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RADIO HILL

(Block 22 Section 13, Fyshwick)

At its meeting of 15 April 2014 the ACT Heritage Council decided that Radio Hill, Fyshwick, was not eligible for provisional registration. The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for Radio Hill against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

The earliest built structure on Radio Hill which is still visible today is the concrete water reservoir that was constructed c.1918 to supply water to the Molonglo Internment Camp (which no longer exists, it was located in the vicinity of Molonglo Mall in Fyshwick). The camp was quickly constructed in ten weeks, including the water reservoir hooked up to the Cotter Dam supply, as the Commonwealth rushed to house hundreds of German families that had been exiled from China after WWI. Despite the amazing feat of organisation to erect the camp so quickly, the intended internees were never housed at the facility following political negotiations from Germany. However, the camp was still used to house German civilians only a short time later when it was used to house people rounded up from nearby Commonwealth controlled areas. The camp continued up until 1920 at which point the internees were relocated and the assets sold off with half of the structures remaining to shortly thereafter form the Molonglo Workers Settlement to house many of the workers who came to the area for the construction of the Capital. The Workers Settlement, at which time there was about 30-40 buildings, started to be demolished in 1935 as residents were moved into other accommodation, but there were still six houses left by 1950 with families still living in them. (Daley, 1965)

The radio station 2CA started out in the back of A. J. Ryan's Radio-Electrical and Musical Service store in Kingston in 1931, reaching an estimated 1,000 listeners. From these humble beginnings the station quickly grew to the point where they were reaching over 17,000 licensed listeners by 1938. (Barlin, 2001; Castle, 1981)

Ryan was the first individual, rather than a business, in the country to be granted a radio licence. From 1931 he ran the station from his store while his assistant, Mary Oldfield, took care of the shopfront and occasionally helping out with the radio broadcasts and it was not until 1933 that Ryan took on another employee, George Barlin, who helped out in the store as well as on the air and behind the scenes. (Barlin, 2001; Castle, 1981)

The station was quite successful and by 1935 it was doing well enough that Ryan, with Barlin's father as a business partner, was able to increase the licensed power output of the station from 50watts to 500watts, making it the most powerful country radio station in the country at the time. The higher powered facilities, including a small studio and transmitting tower, were erected on what was quickly coined Radio Hill in Molonglo, later the industrial suburb of Fyshwick. The expansion of the station also involved moving A. J. Ryan's Radio-Electrical and Musical Service store to a larger premises with an attached broadcasting studio that was connected to the Radio Hill facility via a land line. (Barlin, 2001; Castle, 1981)

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The new equipment had two main advantages. Firstly, the greater power meant a larger audience that could entice more lucrative or new advertising opportunities. Secondly, the new equipment was connected directly to the mains power supply and was no longer limited by the use of chemical based wet batteries that only lasted a few hours and then needed to be recharged overnight. The downside to the new equipment was the remoteness of the facilities which required all of the records and advertising copy to be selected for the entire day's broadcasting before heading out to the site. (Barlin, 2001)

Events and achievements of 2CA while at Radio Hill include:

- What was likely the first 'hospital hour' program in the country where patients could make requests, or people make dedications to patients with get well wishes, which proved to be very popular and was even copied by other stations such the ABC.
- A children's hour program which included an original adventure show, "Ben and Sam", and the country's first *Dad and Dave* show (although it was shortly outclassed by a professional production from 2UW in Sydney).
- Local children from the workers' camp at Molonglo would stand outside the little studio and listen in, making sure to not make a sound while the mike was on.
- For a short time the station was used to fill a gap in aviation communication facilities between Melbourne and Sydney and would communicate with planes via Morse code over the top of regular programming and then via voice when the planes were in range. George Barlin notes that this only lasted a few months until the Canberra Aeradio service was installed in June 1937.
- A program of horoscopes that were imagined by George Barlin or cobbled together from random selections from a horoscopes book.

The station continued to grow in popularity and in 1937 Ryan sold the controlling interest in the company, renamed Canberra Broadcasters Limited, to Denison Estates (who also owned the Sydney Sun and later became Macquarie Broadcasting, which until 1980 was Australia's only national commercial radio network). With the backing of the new owners, and Ryan continuing as a director, a new transmitter of 2,000watts (with provision for increasing to the current maximum output of 5,000watts) was erected near the Barton Highway and the studios moved into larger modern facilities in Civic. As there was little interference from other radio stations at the time the power increase meant that the station was now reaching as far afield as Townsville, Bundaberg and even New Zealand. (Barlin, 2001; Castle, 1981)

The station faced difficult times in the late thirties with increased competition and restrictions related to WWII, however it was not long before it had recovered. The station continually responded to external challenges such as the introduction of television and cassette tapes; a trait that continues today with the recent adoption of digital radio technology. 2CA continues to operate from their latest premises in Mitchell. (Barlin, 2001; Castle, 1981)

A photograph (Image 2) from c.1950 (the date is based on the presence of the Narrabundah prefabricated cottages in the background) shows the early suburb of Fyshwick and in the foreground can be seen Radio Hill. The site had recently been planted with pine trees, still extant today as mature specimens, but at the time it was still quite bare. The large reservoir can be clearly seen with the studio slab to the southeast of it. (Machen, 2000, p.59)

Radio Hill (Block 22 Section 13 Fyshwick) is located on land designated as Urban Open Space in the Territory Plan and is along a Main Avenue and Approach Route in the National Capital Plan which means that the site is subject to special requirements under the National Capital Plan and any development on the block must conform with the Development Control Plan (DCP No.

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171/96/0029). The DCP states that the block represents the start of the transition between a rural and an urban setting and that this change is an important landscape element at one of the perceived entrances to the National Capital. This transition has been somewhat diminished with the addition of a large commercial complex across the road to the southeast (sections 48 and 84-87). Section 3.5.4 of the DCP states that the block should be “...retained as a landscape park free of any buildings or significant structures” as well as noting that any future development should be completed in conjunction with a comprehensive landscape plan. These planning conditions have helped to retain the remaining features of Radio Hill.

Description

Radio Hill is on the northern spur of Mahon Hill. The studio slab and the water reservoir are positioned on the relatively flat crest of this spur above the 598m contour line. The earthworks of a small quarry are ~10m to the east of the studio slab.

The studio slab is roughly 3m x 4.6m. At the time of inspection only the eastern third of the slab was exposed, the rest of it being covered by dirt, pine forest litter, and blackberry bushes. The eastern third of the slab that was exposed had slightly separated from the rest of the slab due to a crack running down the entire length of the slab, the origins of which were the result of tree root damage (the trees immediately surrounding the slab have been cut down several years ago and are no longer a threat). The footings from the southern aerial mast are still visible ~25m to the south of the studio slab with one wooden post still embedded in the concrete base.

Physical condition and integrity

Studio Building Remains

The concrete slab of the radio studio is in moderate to poor condition. The slab has cracked along its entire length in at least one place. The rest of the condition is difficult to determine as it has been covered by pine forest litter and blackberry bushes. The eastern third of the slab is still exposed with several bolts and post holes still visible in the slab. No other evidence of the studio building was found.

Aerial Mast Remains

The concrete footings and a single remaining post were located for only one of the two aerial masts, although two aerial mast footings were relocated in a site visit in 2006. The footings were mostly covered with pine forest litter making the condition difficult to determine, however a visual inspection suggests that the concrete is in reasonable condition and that no other wooden posts are evident. The single remaining wooden post has weathered as any exposed wood is expected to, but is in reasonable condition. No other evidence of the aerial masts was found.

Water Reservoir

The water reservoir from the internment camp is in a moderate condition. The concrete walls appear sound without signs of cracking or structural failure. The floor of the reservoir could not be examined, but it was noted that the reservoir does not appear to hold water. It has been partially filled with organic material allowing weeds and grass to grow inside the reservoir. The cast iron inlet pipe is still visible along the top of the western wall and there are several pieces of original material still attached as well as several disturbed pieces of cast iron piping scattered throughout the surrounding area.

Surrounding Landscape

The area surrounding the studio and reservoir locations has very little integrity of its 1935-38 setting. The area has been heavily scoured and pine trees planted, presumably dating from the 1940s or 1950s. Several tracks have been created with earth moving equipment and there are signs

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of infrastructure associated with the reservoir having been disturbed, i.e. sections of cast iron pipes and scattered pieces of concrete that appear to have the same roadbase coarse material in its matrix as the reservoir walls (the studio slab concrete mix appears to have mixed river pebbles).

SITE PLAN



Image 1 Radio Hill nominated area

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Image 2 Fyshwick c.1950 with Radio Hill in the foreground (National Library of Australia photo, from Machen, 2000 p59)



Image 3 Radio Hill exposed concrete slab of the former 2CA studio and broadcasting facilities. (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)



Image 4 Radio Hill southern aerial mast footings with post. (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)

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Image 5 Radio Hill water reservoir. (ACT Heritage Unit, 2014)

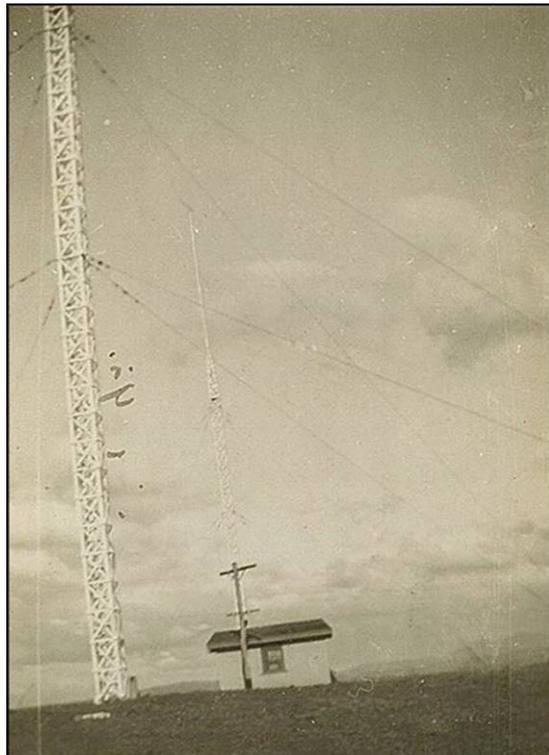


Image 6 Radio Hill 2CA studio and broadcasting facility with aerial masts during operation. (from the personal photo collection of George Barlin, captured screenshot from Bradley et al, 2010)

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