



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL (Block 10 Section 95 Lyneham)

At its meeting of 7 November 2013 the ACT Heritage Council (the Council) decided that the Gungahleen School was no longer eligible for inclusion to the ACT Heritage Register (the Register). The information contained in this report was considered by the Council in reassessing the registration of the Gungahleen School against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* (the Act).

HISTORY

There is a long history of private and public schooling in the region that is now the ACT. The first school in the region opened at Palmerville in 1844. The first public school was established at Yarralumla in about 1850. Early education in the ACT region followed the same pattern for much of NSW and Australia in general. The first schools were sectarian and featured religious teachings heavily. There were many efforts to reform the education system, but sectarian influence held back any change. It was not until the *Public Schools Act of 1866* that schools came under the influence of the government and rules were set up for funding and provision of teachers as well as setting minimum numbers required for full and part-time schools. This, combined with more rural settlement arising from the Robertson Land Acts of 1861, resulted in the establishment of many small rural schools, including Stone Hut School around 1878 which went on to become Gungahleen School. The number of schools grew over time and there seems to have been a significant expansion in the 1870s as a result of the *Public Schools Act of 1866*. Seven schools were constructed during this period in the Canberra district. (Gillespie, 1991)

Gillespie (1991, p.90) notes that, "The last two decades of the nineteenth century witness the opening, closing and change of status of many schools in the Canberra district". A factor in this activity was the *Public Instruction Act of 1880* which provided a new framework for the public school system. Matching this legislative change was the creation of a new government department which was both more energetic and had more funds for schools. Five schools opened in the 1880s and 11 in the 1890s in the Canberra district. The opening of new schools continued in the early part of the twentieth century and beyond.

In 1885 Stone Hut School, which was located on the eastern side of Yass Road, was moved to the western side of the road in a new weatherboard building built by John Kealman of Queanbeyan (Gillespie, 1992). The school continued under the name Stone Hut School until 1888 when a visiting school inspector noted the problem of naming a wooden building 'Stone Hut' and it was renamed Gungahleen School. Due to falling attendance in 1895 it changed status to a half-time school until 1906, when it was closed for a year and then reopened as a full-time school after petitioning from prominent locals. (Gillespie, 1991)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL

In 1915 a new school building was erected that could accommodate up to thirty students. The new school building operated as a full-time school for only a year before falling attendance led to its closure in 1916. Pressure from the local residents and the promise of increased attendance resulting from the influx of new residents to the new capital allowed the school to reopen in 1917 until falling attendance, once again, led to the school's final closure in 1923. (Gillespie, 1991)

In 1923 the building was converted to a residence to be allocated to a teacher and a number of changes were made. The classroom was divided by a wall and the verandah closed in and divided to create two more rooms. The building was then extended to the west with additional rooms, kitchen and facilities. The roof was altered to accommodate the new extended footprint which increased its height and now orientated the building along an east-west axis. Most of the remnant garden dates from this later period when the building was a residence. The building continued as a residence until 1988 and was left unoccupied until 2001.

Gungahleen School was nominated to the Register in 1991 following an assessment by the ACT Heritage Unit. It was registered in 1998. Following several years of neglect and several letters of complaint by concerned members of the community the building was restored in 2001 by the ACT government TAMS Property Group to reflect its heritage status and to allow it to be used by community groups. The building was occupied by the YWCA until it burnt down in 2007. Following an engineer's report (Crawford & Co, 2007) the building was condemned and demolished in 2010 and then a new building was erected in its place designed to resemble the last state of the building before it burnt down in 2007. After its reincarnation, the building was occupied by the Women's Legal Centre (ACT and Region).

The Conservation Management Plan by Eric Martin & Associates (2012) suggested that the registration be updated to reflect the changes in the place since the destruction of the original building and the construction of the new building.

Description

Pre-2007 fire

Very little is known of the original 1885 wooden building which is only identified through documentary evidence including one photograph (Image 4). The building appeared to be a small single room wood framed and clad design. It was unusual in that it had vertical wooden cladding, which was not common in Australia at the time (Lewis, 2006). The history of this building is unclear; it is not included in the plans for the 1915 building, but analysis of historic photographs (Eric Martin & Associates, 2012) suggest that the 1885 and 1915 buildings were on separate parts of the block and could have co-existed for quite some time.

Before it burnt down, the building contained the original 1915 schoolhouse (Images 3 and 5) with the 1923 extension and any other modifications it may have been subject to including those related to its refurbishment in 2001. Any references to the original building will be to this final known state unless specifically stated.

The original building (Images 6 and 7) was of timber construction with a galvanised iron roof. It was supported on concrete piers. The frame of the building and roof timbers were pine. The floor joists and bearers were Australian hardwood (Eucalyptus sp.) and the floor was pine. The external cladding was of shiplap construction of Western Red Cedar. The internal wall and ceiling cladding was tongue and groove pine. The door frames, doors and window frames were all Western Red Cedar. The window sills were hardwood. There were two open fireplaces, one in the classroom and the other in the residence, and a space to accommodate a fuel stove in the kitchen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL

A narrow concrete path circled the building and there were paths leading away from the front and rear porches. The remnants of an orchard are still located behind the schoolhouse and there are a number of ornamental trees and shrubs including mature pines and cypresses to the north and west.

The 1915 plan of the school can be seen in Image 3. It should be noted that in this plan the building is facing west, but was actually built facing east towards the road and it is in reference to the built form that directions are referring to in this document. It contained a single room with a fireplace in the north side of the western wall, a blackboard on the northern wall, windows along the western wall, a door on the west side of the northern wall and a door at the north end of the eastern wall leading to the verandah/washroom. The verandah/washroom was on the east side of the building and had two small windows on either side of the open eastern wall entrance, and provisions inside for seating, basins and hat pegs.

The building was extended and converted for use as a residence in 1923. From the 1915 building, it was extended to the west with the addition of a hallway, bathroom, kitchen, pantry, bedroom, laundry and rear verandah. The 1915 classroom was modified by adding windows to the north and south walls, adding a dividing wall, adding a door on the west wall on either side of the dividing wall and adding a door on the eastern wall of the southern division. The 1915 verandah was modified by closing off the open east wall, adding a door, the enclosed verandah was divided by an internal wall, with a door and a window added to the southern wall. A new open verandah was then added extending east from the old verandah. It is also assumed that it was in 1923 that the water tanks that flanked the 1915 building were removed, but what happened to them is unknown.

To accommodate the extensions to the 1915 building, the roof of the original school, which ran north-south, was remodelled so that it ran east-west.

The additions and modification to the school formed part of the building's history and reflected its changing function from a school to a residence. There was a continuance of building material and style both internally and externally.

The building was considered sound in 1992 before it was refurbished, although there had been vandalism in the form of broken windows and graffiti, which had necessitated boarding up windows and doors. A report prepared by Giovanelli (1992) established that the soundness of the structure would allow easy, economical conservation, which was conducted in 2001.

Before the 2007 fire, the Gungahleen School was an example of an early surviving school now in the ACT, and was associated with the major changes brought about by and related to the NSW *Public Schools Act of 1866*, *Public Instruction Act of 1880*, as well as the Robertson Land Acts of 1861. These changes provided a very important framework for New South Wales public education and the provision of more resources by the Government, and were reflected in the physical material of the building and its extensions.

Post-2010 recreation

The post-2010 recreated building (Images 2 and 8), which will be referred to as 'the new building', is a reinterpretation of the original building. It is the result of a design brief commissioned by TAMS Property Group in 2008 and prepared by Sellick Consultants, which resulted in Ruckschloss Consulting preparing the architectural plans. The brief called for a building that was in sympathy with the original school building, but allowed for alternative materials to be substituted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL

“Reconstruction of a replica of the Schoolhouse in exact same location and of same appearance as existing building. Materials used to be as close as possible to original timber building, but commercially viable. Reuse existing parts if possible and keep existing brick chimneys.” (Section 3 from Sellick Consultants, 2008.)

The Conservation Management Plan for the Gungahleen School was prepared by Eric Martin & Associates in 2012 which lists the following significant differences between the original building and the new building (p.25):

- windows lower in wall;
- windows stained not painted;
- front and rear verandahs are more enclosed;
- entry door central on front verandah;
- fibre cement board cladding used in place of weatherboard;
- timber ramp to front entry replaces timber steps;
- concrete paths to entry and along north side are a post 2007 detail;
- air conditioner unit on roof and no roof vents;
- roof cladding is Colorbond not galvanised corrugated iron; and
- internal layout modified in kitchen, laundry and bathroom

Additionally, they note that the 1915 building had a lower roof ridgeline, which ran in a north-south direction which was a result of the single room design. The room representing the 1915 classroom was used instead of the 1923 design which split it into two separate rooms. The rear wall has been extended further to the east and the rear verandah has been enclosed.

Physical condition and integrity

As a relatively recent structure the Gungahleen School is in excellent physical condition. However, the integrity of its heritage values is very low. The only remaining physical materials from the original building are the bricks that have been used to recreate the fireplaces, but the fireplaces themselves are not original, nor are they of a comparable nature in extent.

Although the site visit occurred during winter, making it difficult to judge the condition of deciduous species, the surviving trees appear to be in fair condition (Image 9) with the exception of the remaining three apple trees (Image 10) from the orchard which require some horticultural care.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL

SITE PLAN

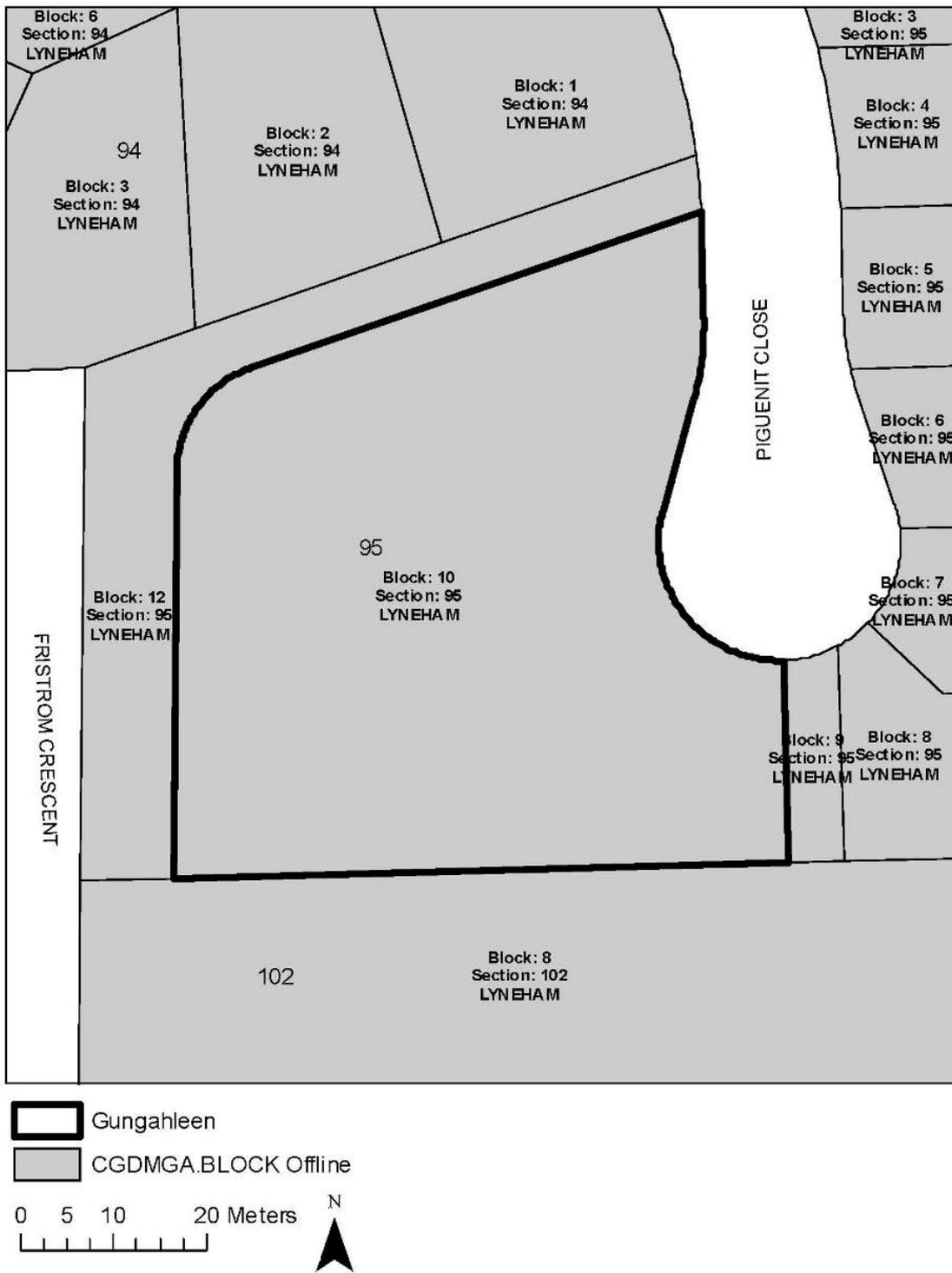


Image 1. Gungahleen School existing site boundary

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAAHLEEN SCHOOL

IMAGES

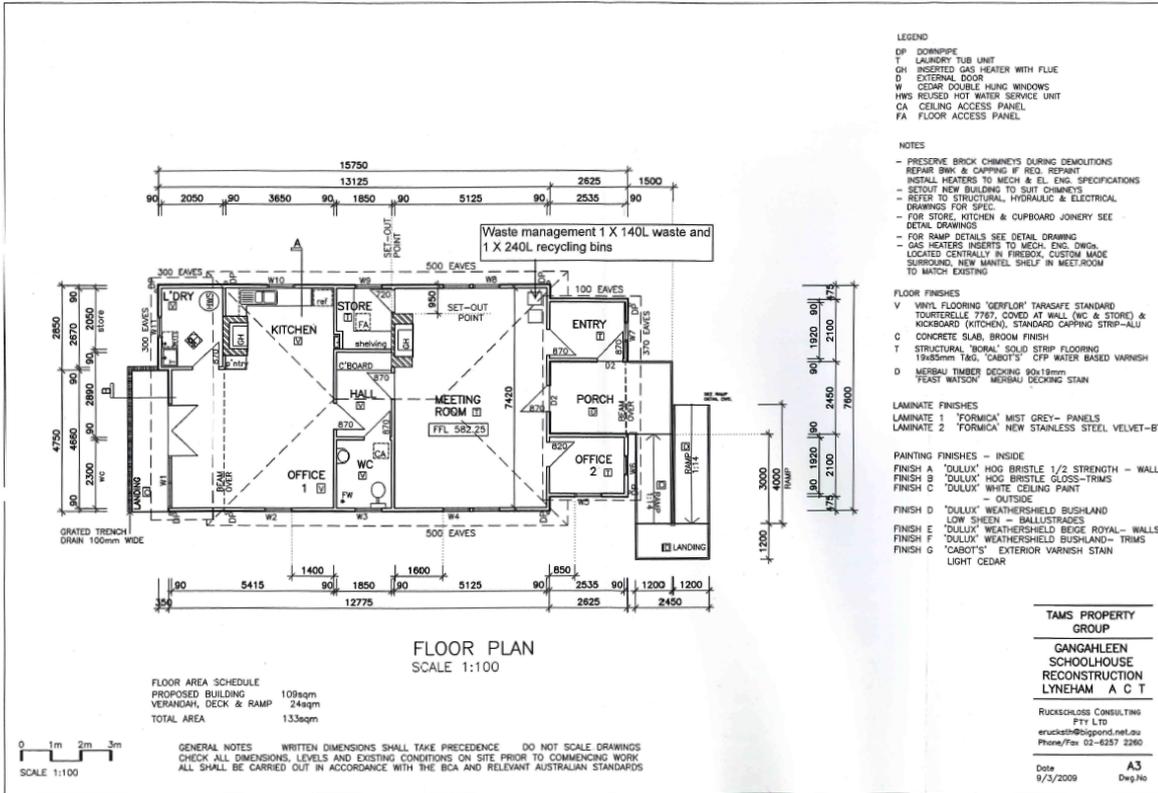


Image 2. Gungahleen School new building/recreation floor plan (Ruckschloss Consulting , 2009)

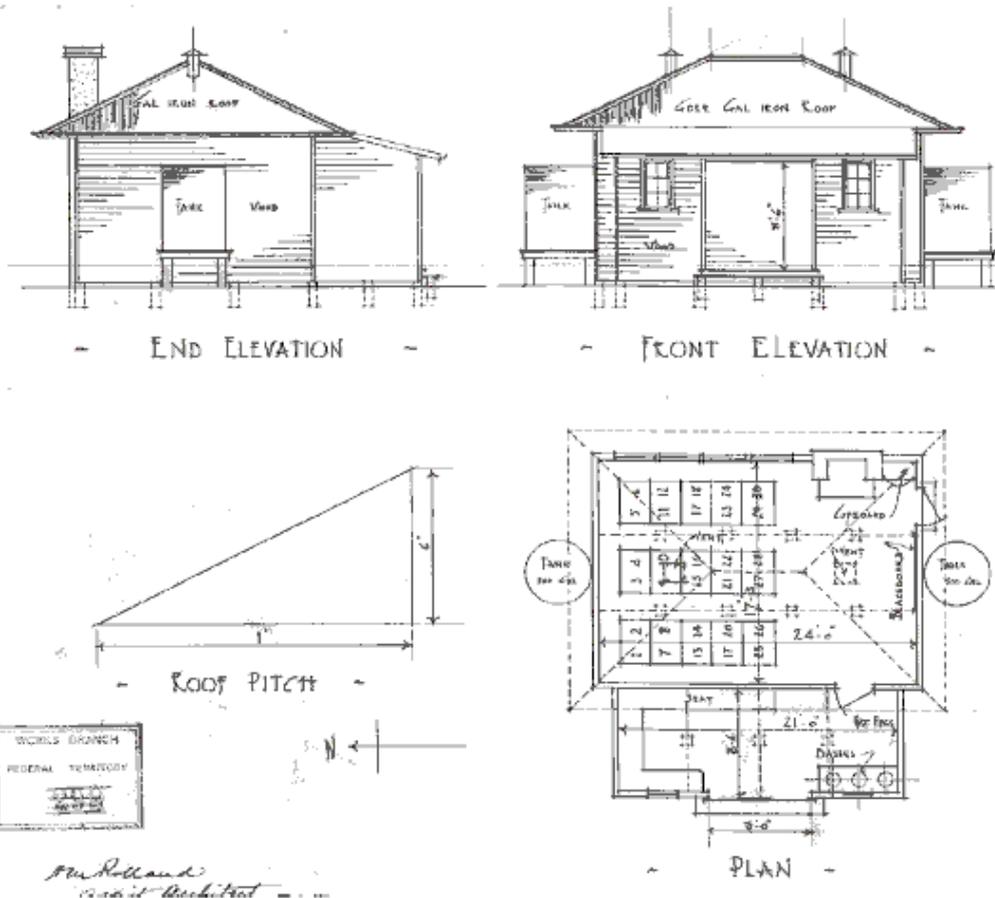


Image 3. Plan of 1915 Gungahleen School (NAA A2502 AB402)

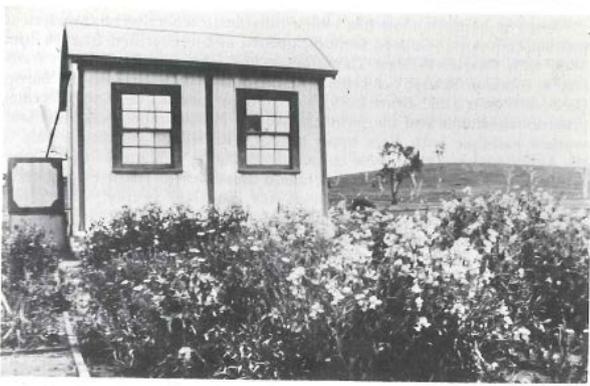


Image 4. Early Gungahleen School, pre-1915 wood building (p.93 Gillespie, 1991)

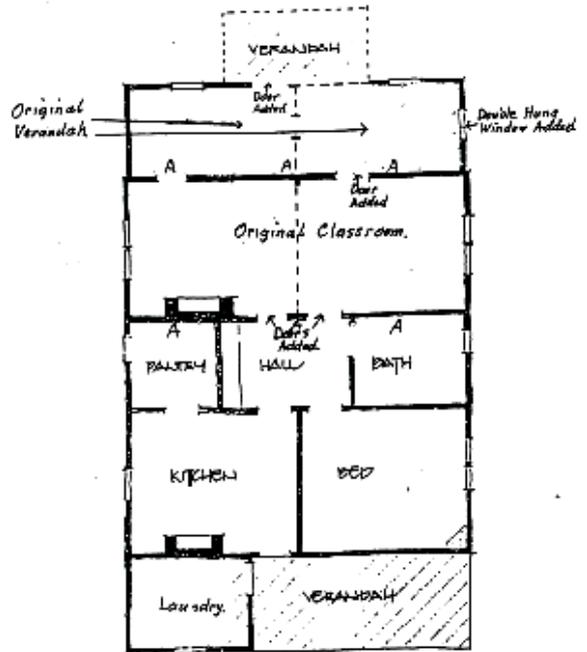


Image 5. Gungahleen School between 1915-1923 (<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn3572294>)



Image 6. Gungahleen School c.2008 after fire (CampPix via Bonzle, <http://bonzle.com/c/a?a=col&fn=h22apjff&c=49&col=show&or=2&sz=4&pg=0&yr=0&mo=19836786>)

*Sketch Plan Gungahleen School.
Additions to School Building To Convert to School Residence
1943.*



*Original ship-lap external cladding removed and replaced with tongue-and-grooved pine lining.
Added Structures to the original school building*



Image 7. Sketch Plan of Gungahleen School c.1991 (National Trust ACT)



Image 8. Gungahleen School southeast corner (ACT Heritage Unit, 2013)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – GUNGAHLEEN SCHOOL



Image 9. Gungahleen School central Cyprus tree cluster (ACT Heritage Unit, 2013)



Image 10. Gungahleen School remnant apple trees (ACT Heritage Unit, 2013)

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Norma Chi. Personal communication, February 1995

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