



## ACT Heritage Council

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION JERILDERIE COURT (BLOCK 1 SECTION 9, REID)

At its meeting of 10 October 2023 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Jerilderie Court was not eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Jerilderie Court against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Jerilderie Court was built by government for the provision of social housing complex. It was designed by Philip Cox and Partners in 1975-76, completed in 1977 and opened in 1978. Cox Architecture was a prominent Australian practice at that time.

#### Cox Architecture

Philip Cox started architecture in 1963, quickly establishing a name for himself in the Sydney School of Architecture. The firm started off with smaller domestic designs, before moving into educational architecture in 1964 when Cox and Ian McKay designed the C B Alexander Agricultural College in Tocal NSW in what he described as a first attempt at a distinctly Australian modern architecture (Cox, 2012:3). The firm came to the attention of the NCDC (National Capital Development Commission) in the 1970s with a highly regarded entry for the design of the High Court, which, although not successful, did lead to a number of government contracts in Canberra, starting with the Kambah Health Centre, in the late 1970s (Towndrow, 1991:181). The Canberra office of Cox Architecture was established in 1977. They expanded with several offices across the country and then internationally, mostly focused on Asia, in the 1980s and 90s. The firm is best known for designing large and prestigious buildings and precincts, including various stadiums and museums and other cultural institutes (Cox, 2013). Cox Architecture has won numerous awards over the decades including the Inaugural International Olympic Committee (IOC) Award for Architecture in Sport, the Commonwealth Association of Architects Sir Robert Matthew Award, the BHP Architecture of the Decade Award, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) Sir Zelman Cowen Award, two RAIA Sir John Sulman Medals, three RAIA Wilkinson Awards, the RAIA Blakett Award, the RAIA Tracey Memorial Award, the RAIA Canberra Medallion, the RAIA C S Daley Award, as well as several other RAIA Awards and two Institute of Engineers Awards.

In 1984, the RAIA included the following Canberra examples as exemplars of his work: the AIS buildings, the Family Court, the Kambah Health Centre, Jerilderie Court, the Embassy of Ireland, Radford College, and the Secretariat for the National Council of Independent Schools, while the 1988 update also includes Stage 88. However, in later years the examples that were used in other publications and the various iterations of the Cox website would only include the AIS buildings and sometimes the Embassy of Ireland, instead focusing on the larger and more modern examples of sporting facilities, education buildings, museums and various projects from around the world.

Cox has described the firm's ethos as one of craft, structure and environment: in that that they use a high level of crafting details to create a quality product; structure is expressed to make it easy to understand; and they have a relationship with, and inspired by, nature for designs to sit in their environment and reflect an Australian architecture (Cox, 2013:3).

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Cox was the first architect chosen by the RAI A for their Australian Architect series of publications due to his contributions to architecture in both designs and writing, and they describe him as one of the founding heroes of the Sydney School. The architectural style, or practitioners, of the Sydney School made designs that were more inward facing and ignored the monotony of the suburban street (RAIA, 1984:7). The RAI A describe his style as one of, "...commonsense pragmatism: straightforward (honest) use of natural. Low maintenance materials, attention to natural light, orientation, ventilation and thermal performance, simple detailing and structural clarity" which is described as all being very Australian (RAIA, 1982:2).

In his 1984 A. S. Hook address, Cox laments the loss of regional styles of architecture and that it has become homogenised globally. The Australian homestead, located out in the bush, remains true, but once the scale moves into commercial, into the city or just generally more complicated, then it falls. "Without some self-evaluation it is difficult to know how to proceed in the future because I most sincerely believe to live in Australia is to be dominated by its landscape. I know of no other country where a capital city such as Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide can be blackened by the smoke of bushfires, or the heat from the inland. You are continuously aware of the landscape it is the generator of our culture, our myths and legends. It was the generator of the myths of the aboriginal people before us."

### Public Housing

Government provision of public housing in Canberra developed differently to that in other parts of Australia and as such forms a crucial element in Canberra's history. Unlike other cities, where the main focus of public housing is to provide a minimum level of accommodation for those who cannot afford to provide it for themselves, in Canberra, a large program of public housing established from 1927 provided housing for all classes of society. It was not until 1972 that the number of privately built dwellings surpassed the number built by government (Wright, 2000:6). Jerilderie Court marks a transition in the provision of government housing in the ACT away from the provision of housing for a broad sector of workers moving to the ACT to providing a minimum level of accommodation for those who cannot otherwise obtain it.

There are three major phases of government housing in the ACT: Post-War (1945-57), NCDC (1958-72), and Alignment with National Policy/Social Housing (1973-89) (Philip Leeson Architects, 2012:21). The first two phases are concerned with housing the general population of the ACT as private construction simply could not keep up with the housing required to create and populate the new and developing national capital; however, a paradigm shift occurs in the 1970s when private building starts to move ahead of government-built housing and policy shifts locally and nationally along with an economic downturn and a greater population. Additionally, the last of the compulsory government transfers were finalised in 1973, significantly decreasing the impetus for government provided housing and the government subsidies for staying in government housing became means-based, making it less desirable to stay in public housing when it was based on market forces (Philip Leeson Architects, 2012:35).

This third phase of ACT government housing places the building of Jerilderie Court *after* the 'long boom' of planning where post-war development was pulled back by changes in global economics, with local changes leading to a focus on political movements, participatory governance, feminism, environmentalism and a greater sense of social justice (Freestone, 2010). One of the ways this coalesced was looking for better ways to make use of the land, or denser development and more resources for social housing. "The main battlegrounds in the counter-moves towards more participatory, socially responsible and environmentally sensitive planning tended to be the central city...from the 1970s, the role of special issue, environmental and resident action groups becomes more important and influential in urban governance" (Freestone, 2010:27-28).

Freestone (2010:192) notes that many housing estates of the 1960s were planned with the best intentions, but consistently failed and produced poor social outcomes. Usually linked to repetitive and low-quality building, with little attention to landscaping and community facilities, but it was also linked to short-sighted overall planning, often ignoring social and locational disadvantage, employment prospects and that

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concentrating social disadvantage generally led to exacerbated social problems and then stigma of such places in the public eye.

Efforts to address the planning shortcomings emerged in the 1970s, with “...four major trends...identified in suburban community planning: urban consolidation, environmental management, lifestyle communities and higher design standards” (Freestone, 2010:200). The increased density was supposed to increase housing choice and affordability and Swinger Hill is an excellent example of this new planning and received praise from Robin Boyd and the architectural profession and has continued to be successful. This change in approach was also noted by Cox in his 1984 A. S. Hook address, when he stated, “the various state housing commissions in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have recently taken up the challenge other states have and gained new ground improving the standard of design and the environment”.

There was a general trend for housing to be low-density or high density pre-1970s (Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:1-2); however, the NCDC at the time were in a unique position to experiment with different ways to design and build suburbs as both regulator/policy-maker and developer: they had a progressive agenda of green values and social responsibility and used leading architects from across the country for an influx of fresh new ideas and high-quality work (Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:3-4). Radburn planning featured prominently with great weight put on a mix of private and public space, separation of people and vehicles as well as green areas and working with in the existing site (Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:3).

The NCDC’s standard flats program originated in the early 1970s with the Co-ordination Committee meeting of 27 November 1974 instructing that future government flats were to be integrated with detached housing in new areas. NCDC files (NC-74/01389 and NC-75/00033) show several medium density flat projects earmarked for sites in Scullin, Holt, Holder, Hawker, Weston and Kambah; all with high densities of dwellings per hectare, e.g. Weston Section 76, blocks 2 and 3 were design by Leith & Bartlett for a density around 60 dwellings per hectare. These standard flats aimed to produce 200 housing units each year with the medium density developments achieving densities between 20-40 dwelling per hectare compared to 5 in low density areas (Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:3).

The medium-density experiments met with varying degree of success. The most notable examples of this period of medium-density experimentation include (noted in Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:3): Swinger Hill by Ian McKay Architects, Fisher Housing by Cameron Nichol, Jerilderie Court by Cox Architects, Campbell and Garran Housing Groups by Harry Seidler and Associates, Urambi Village by Michael Dysart Architects, and Wybalena Grove by Michael Dysart Architects. However, designing medium-density housing is extremely complex and needs to take into consideration, “...personalisation, territory, way-finding, flexibility, comfort, and delight” and some have claimed that this complexity was responsible for the inability for them to really catch on (Dodson & Mackenzie, 2015:4). One of the issues with many other public housing designs (including Jerilderie Court) that is highlighted by Dodson & Mackenzie (2015) is that there is little to no end-user input when it was being designed; it was entirely led by theory and a projection of the architect about what the intended tenants would want/need as tempered by what the tight budget would allow for.

Cox designed many public housing projects across the country and learnt from experience how tenants react to various aspects of the buildings and has attempted to improve with each iteration (Towndrow, 1991: 248-249). Cox has pointed out issues with older designs failing to take into account privacy and the way that tenants personalise and use a place not always being the same as his private clients (Towndrow, 1991: 248-249). Early in the firm’s history (referred by Cox as their first phase between 1960-1980), they had several public housing projects, but it was not until their second phase from 1980 that they were able to apply lessons learnt from these earlier examples so their later public housing projects focused on privacy, security and identity (Cox, 2008:21).

We had to revisit certain principles. The use in some of our early public housing projects of the Radburn Plan, where vehicular and pedestrian circulation is differentiated, had to be abandoned due to a lack of public ownership of pedestrian streets. These, we found,

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eventually became places for youths to hang out and use drugs. Some areas became outright dangerous, falling into disuse.

(Philip Cox, in Cox, 1991:21).

Cox wanted to “de-institutionalise” public housing through design so that there should be very little distinctive between private and public housing of the same type; and as such, would focus on the definitions of private and communal spaces, the interface with the public street and the opportunity for individual self-expression by occupants (Cox, 1997:9).

Between 1975 and 1988, Cox designed several public housing projects “...that were notable for their integration with gritty urban contexts, their planning innovations, and their formal attributes”; however the use of Radburn planning principles was considered a failure in this context, with Cox noting that the closed off areas were not a good idea and that public housing needs open space and exposed areas to be safe – an idea that he applied to later 1980s public housing designs that he still considers have survived the test of time (Bingham-Hall, 2020:56).

It is interesting though that during this time, big name architectural firms were designing public housing projects across Australia, but that this was a product of the times and there is no longer a demand from planners, or appetite from the firms, for the big names to be involved in public housing schemes (Bingham-Hall, 2020:56). This shift has been attributed to social and economic forces, but could also be a result of the failure of architects’ lofty goals of curing social woes through design that was prominent throughout the world at the time.

The Radburn Plan just didn’t work for public housing. I thought at the time that the dedication of pedestrian ways and shared public zones would be invigorating for the community, but the spaces became drug alleys...it was a disaster. In fact, it was the worst thing we could have done. I quickly realised that any space in public housing should be exposed, so that any anti-social behaviour can be instantly detected...you can’t have secret spaces in housing estates.

(Philip Cox, quoted in Bingham-Hall, 2020:56)

### Jerilderie Court

Jerilderie Court was designed to accommodate 62 dwellings within nine blocks of buildings between two and three storeys in height. It was designed with a variety of dwelling types with the ideal of suited various occupants, from singles, to young families to elderly couples. There is a mix of parking, mostly grouped in open, carports, open under block parking areas, and single mews-style parking. It was part of a larger plan for the area to have a mix of dense development covering several adjacent sections with a mix of private (163) and government (62) dwellings.

It was well-received in the architectural profession, but did not receive the same praise from the community. Given the passing of time, Cox now describes Jerilderie Court as being unsuccessful, but clearly a learning experience. Despite intentions otherwise, it ended up being one of the more expensive government flats in Canberra at the time.

Cox’s first significant [public housing] commission was Jerilderie Court (1975), adjacent to Canberra’s commercial centre, and it encouraged a cheerful community lifestyle, with common courtyards and gardens weaving through a staggered plan of two-storey townhouses. Its intentions, however, were undermined by its adherence to the then-admired Radburn Plan, which advocated semi-autonomous housing precincts that turned their backs to public streets so that residents could look out to quiet and private gardens and thoroughfares. Although this may have been eminently suitable for middle-class American suburbia...to visit Jerilderie Court now is a depressing and short-lived

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experience, as common areas are decrepit and they are dangerous: they are no-go zones beyond the control of authority.

(Bingham-Hall, 2020:56)

Referencing the use of pale yellow bricks, white paint, green grass and red roof tiles as well as the use of open space within controlled siting with modest, not mean buildings, Jerilderie Court was said to “...explore the possibilities of colour and assonance at a human scale. ... It is not great architecture, certainly not the best of Cox, but it shows how much can be made out of very little” (RAIA, 1984:16).

The limitations of budget and density within the siting presented a problem that resulted in a not very satisfactory solution of long tall entrances and closed in passages that contribute to the safety issues that emerged over the years; this is partly due to the oblique angled siting that, while creating an interesting zig-zagging internal area, uses up a lot of space that could have been used to open up access areas and increase passive surveillance (RAIA, 1984:93).

### DESCRIPTION

Jerilderie Court, completed in 1977, was designed in response to a places’ context rather than a conscious exercise in any specific architectural style. It contains a variety of dwelling types within nine blocks of buildings and taking up an entire section bounded by Ainslie Avenue, Allambee Street, Doonkuna Street and Elimatta Street. While not a conscious decision to create a specific type of architectural style, the place does fit in with the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (Apperly, et al. 1994:240-243) which has the following defining characteristics (those in bold apply to Jerilderie Court)

- Broad Characteristics
  - **Rugged, natural, often following the topography of the site.**
  - Split-level houses fitted to steep sites, often providing rich, complex interiors.
  - Textural and tactile qualities of materials expressed.
  - **Relaxed and informal, though carefully contrived.**
- Settings and Relationships
  - Steeply sloping harbourside sites.
  - **Natural bushland left largely undisturbed.**
  - **Supplementary plantings of Australian flora arranged informally.**
  - The skillion was the favoured roof shape.
- Exterior Characteristics
  - Massing reflecting function and landform.
  - **Roofs, covered with dark-toned tiles, following the slope of the land.**
  - Rafters, posts and beams exposed and left ‘off the saw’ and stained or oiled to express natural qualities.
  - Walls of clinker brick or painted brick.
  - **Textures and colours generally natural or neutral, with contrasts of white-painted surfaces.**
  - **Little concern for the ‘façade’ as a presentation front.**
- Structure and Construction
  - **Timber post-and-beam construction, timber-framed floors and brick bearing walls.**
- Other Qualities
  - The style, perceived as appropriate for the Sydney market, was adopted by project builders such as Petit & Sevitt, who commissioned leading practitioners to design demonstration houses for replication on clients’ sites
- Style Indicators (*italics* are indicators peculiar or vital to understanding the character of the style)
  - ***Asymmetrical massing***

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- ***Roof following slope of land***
- ***Tiled skillion roof***
- **Flat roof**
- Clerestory window
- Timber post-and-beam construction
- Exposed rafters
- Exposed roof beam
- Timber deck
- *Clinker brick walling*
- Painted brick walling
- Boarded stud wall
- *Stained or oiled timber*
- Timber awning sash
- Slatted timber screen

### Physical condition and integrity

Site visits suggests that the complex has a reasonable level of integrity, with some significant changes to the central shared space landscaping and ongoing maintenance issues. The internal condition of some of the units showed moisture/mould issues and in at least one unit the kitchen ceiling was collapsing due to moisture and mould. Additionally, there are some large sections of brick walls that have been repaired with a terracotta coloured brick rather than matching the ubiquitous yellow-grey bricks used elsewhere.

Noted changes and alterations (indicative only):

- Some of the tiled skillion roofs are damaged and leaking and in need of repair
- Several aluminium windows and sliding doors have been replaced across various units
- During the early 2000s units 13 and 14 were fire damaged and were refitted internally (gyprock and battens, tiles, windows internal doors and kitchens), although no structural damage to unit 14, unit 13 required significant works including a new roof structure.
- In 2002 a new garbage hopper structure was added at the Allambie St entrance and an adjacent courtyard wall was added
- In 1996, the shared area lighting was replaced
- Various electrical points, controls, fans, etc. replaced as required throughout life of units
- Various internal fitouts, including kitchens, appliances, taps, doors, fittings, etc.
- Balcony screen mesh has been added over the original railings
- Ad-hoc privacy screens
- Various clothes lines have been added
- Landscaping, including private areas has been altered from original, but in reasonable condition
- Several areas of brickwork have been repaired or filled in with non-matching bricks.

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SITE PLAN



Image 1 Jerilderie Court site boundary



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**IMAGES**



**Figure 1 Jerilderie Court - northeast corner facing southwest**



**Figure 2 Jerilderie Court - Common area central facing west**



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**Figure 3 Jerilderie Court – internal car access and mews parking facing central area with units 28-31 left and 21-25 right**



**Figure 4 Jerilderie Court - Unit 2-7 entrance**



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**Figure 5 Jerilderie Court - units 1 2 4 6**



**Figure 6 Jerilderie Court - Units 21-25 facing north**



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**Figure 7 Jerilderie Court - Units 13-14 tree allowances in roof design; Figure 8 Jerilderie Court - Units 32-35 undercroft parking external**

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