



## ACT Heritage Council

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### KANANGRA COURT

#### (Block 1 Section 11, REID)

At its meeting of 9 April 2015 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Kanangra Court, Reid was not eligible for provisional registration.

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

### HISTORY

#### **Public housing in Canberra and the city's early growth and development**

Public housing 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 has 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, p.6).

The Government provided housing in all manner of forms: hostels, hotels, detached residences, and flats. Well before Parliament's first sitting in Canberra in 1927, the Federal Government knew that it would need to provide housing for those relocating to the nation's capital.

In 1912 the Minister for Home and Territories stated that 'it appears that the Government must, therefore, be responsible for housing its officials who are transferred from Melbourne, and who are on a different footing from the commercial population, and will suffer some hardship and inconvenience on their compulsory transfer to the seat of government' (Wright, 2000, p.6).

The Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) was established in recognition that the pace of work had to be lifted significantly if the Seat of Government were to move to the capital. (Wright, 2000:3) The FCAC, constrained by limited funding, built only 126 houses across four residential subdivisions. It had a little more success building hostels with the completion of Hotel Canberra (now the Hyatt Hotel), Hotel Ainslie (now Gorman House), Hotel Kurrajong and Hotel Acton and hostels in Brisbane Avenue and Telopea Park. (Wright, 2000, p.4)

The Federal Capital Commission (FCC) was established in 1925 and set about providing housing for the expected influx of construction workers and public servants. In the year to 30 June 1927 the FCC approved construction of 545 Government houses. A year later 646 public servants had been transferred to Canberra with office and residential accommodation provided. This included houses, hotel and hostel accommodation (Wright, 2000, p.17).

The Depression was accompanied by a downturn in the transfer program and with the change of Government in 1930, the FCC was wound up and Canberra reverted to divided departmental control. A partly elected ACT Advisory Council was then established to provide residents of the ACT with representation on local matters. ([http://www.library.act.gov.au/find/history/frequentlyaskedquestions/personal\\_stories/act\\_advisory\\_council,\\_1930-1974](http://www.library.act.gov.au/find/history/frequentlyaskedquestions/personal_stories/act_advisory_council,_1930-1974)).

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By the late 1930s the piecemeal approach to development by the Department of Interior and other responsible agencies was having significant adverse impacts. In February 1939, there were 400 people on the waiting list for government housing in Canberra. Administration was not coping with Canberra's rate of growth (Wright, 2000, p.28).

There were also concerns about approaches to planning and development of the capital. To safeguard the Griffin Plan and maintain architectural standards, the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC) was established as an advisory body to the Minister of the Interior in 1939 (Archives ACT Finding Aid 'National Capital Development Commission Records'). This body reviewed and commented on many of the post-war housing development plans until 1958 when the National Capital Development Commission was established.

During World War II construction of Government houses in Canberra was halted leaving Canberra with an estimated shortage of 500 houses through the latter part of the war.

Putting still further pressure on the housing situation, Cabinet decided in 1948 to recommence the program of transferring the public service from Melbourne to Canberra (Wright, 2000, p.29).

In 1955 the Administrative Building (the first public service office block of significant size) was nearing completion. In that year the Government planned to transfer 1,500 public servants from Melbourne to Canberra over three years, and the Department of the Interior estimated a need for 4,000 new dwellings by 1958.

After it became clear that the construction of single housing was not going to meet the growing waiting list for accommodation, alternative housing models were considered. To compound the problem, since World War II building costs had escalated dramatically, there were shortages of materials – which led to rationing arrangements – and a lack of tradesmen. A quick-fix solution was needed. Blocks of flats, which had previously been considered as the cause of congestion and unhealthy conditions, suddenly found favour (Wright, 2000, p.29).

### **Construction of housing flats in Canberra**

The provision of public housing over the period of the construction and development of the National Capital is a significant and distinct example of the provision of public housing in Australia. The Commonwealth Government was the predominant provider of housing in Canberra from the 1920s until 1972 when NCDC encouragement of private enterprise construction and the purchase of government houses succeeded in tipping the scales towards private investment in housing (NCDC p. 15)

In the post-war period government housing provision in Canberra entered a new phase of medium density development in response to the decision to complete the transfer of Government departments from Melbourne to Canberra. The NCPDC made a clear distinction between Commonwealth provision of public housing elsewhere in Australia as part of the post-war reconstruction program, and the provision of housing that would meet both the standards of planning and design in the National Capital and the needs of public servants. (41<sup>st</sup> meeting 6-7 October 1944) It was not until the 1970s that provision of public housing in Canberra became more aligned with the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements concerning low-income social housing (Hutchison, 2000, p.50)

The three initial developments to be constructed by the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing in response to the housing shortages were the Griffith Flats (1948), the Braddon and Reid flats (1951) and the Ainslie Flats (1952). The design of these flats followed Garden City principles, of two storey load bearing brick construction arranged around the edges of long rectangular blocks, facing the surrounding streets, irrespective of solar orientation and with a shared central area. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014 p.55)

The Griffith Flats consisted of 48 two-bedroom units on a rectangular site bounded by Canberra Avenue, Eyre Street, Oxley Street and Dawes Street. The units were spread over eight two-storey blocks, each facing a road frontage with the central area between the blocks containing facilities for car parking and clothes drying.

The Braddon Flats, located on a rectangular site on the northern side of Ainslie Avenue and facing onto Elimatta, Bateman and Gooreen Streets, comprised of eight two-storey buildings containing 48 two-bedroom flats. The Reid flats were directly opposite on a rectangular site facing onto Elimatta, Allambee and Gooreen Streets, comprised 20 one-bedroom units and 28 two-bedroom units. Both complexes comprised eight two-storey blocks, each facing a road frontage with the central area between the blocks containing facilities for car parking and clothes drying.

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The Ainslie Flats, located on a rectangular site bounded by Hayley Street, Chisholm Street, Quick Street and Howe Crescent, consisted of 32 one-bedroom units and 56 two-bedroom units. The eight two-storey buildings were arranged to face street frontages with a central area between the blocks containing facilities for car parking and clothes drying.

The construction of the Allawah and Bega Courts (1956/57), the Currong Flats (1959) and the Northbourne Flats (1959) demonstrated a shift in design intent towards modernist site planning techniques and construction. The need for an appropriate architecture for the large commission, and its important location, provided an opportunity to shift away from architectural styles previously employed on housing projects and to experiment with elements and concepts of International Style design and construction techniques. The flats were arranged on their sites to create smaller areas of shared open space with some of the smaller blocks raised on 'pilotis' or columns to allow parking below the buildings. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014, p.56)

The Allawah and Bega Courts consisted of eight three-storey blocks of two-bedroom flats. They presented to Cooyong Street as six blocks of 18 flats raised on columns over car parks with laundries under two blocks. Behind this row of blocks, a further ten blocks of 12 flats on the ground formed rectangular courtyards between. The complex demonstrates characteristics of Post-War International Style (1940-1960) including a cubiform overall shape, overhang for shade, plain, smooth wall surfaces, cantilevered balconies and contrasting texture between brick and rendered facades.

The Currong Flats, adjacent to Allawah and Bega Courts (known later as the 'ABC flats') consisted of six eight-storey buildings, comprising 184 one bedroom flats and 28 two bedroom flats. They presented to Currong Street and Ainslie Avenue and also demonstrated some aspects of the Post-War International Style, such as cubiform overall shape, overhangs for shade, plain smooth wall surfaces, cantilevered balconies and contrasting textures. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014, p.66)

The Northbourne Flats consisted of 24 three-bedroom, 154 two-bedroom and 70 one-bedroom flats located on two sites, in Turner and Braddon, facing each other across Northbourne Avenue. The development on the Turner side of Northbourne Avenue is bounded by Condamine Street, Forbes Street and Greenway Street and the development on the Braddon side of Northbourne Avenue is bounded by Henty Street and the boundaries of Haig Park and the Canberra Rex Hotel. The complex consists of two building blocks types, both 3 storeys high – those that contain two-bedroom flats with the one-bedroom flats attached by glazed links and those that contain three-bedroom flats. The Flats exhibit some features of the Post-War International Style (1940 - 1960) such as cubiform overall shape, plain, smooth wall surfaces and exposure of structure frames.

Allawah and Bega Courts were initiated and completed during the period in which the NCPDC was the advisory body. The Currong and the Northbourne Flats were initiated at the same time but completed by the NCDC after it came into operation in 1958. With queues for housing growing and more transfers planned, Stuart Flats, Lachlan Court and Gowrie Court were priority construction projects in the NCDC's first two years.

The Stuart Flats, Griffith constructed in 1959 continued the overall site planning arrangement evident in the Allawah and Bega Courts and the Northbourne Housing Precinct, although located on a steeply sloping site which resulted in less clarity of the parking and common areas. Furthermore their architectural expressions remained in the restrained Inter-War Georgian style. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014, p.56)

The Stuart Flats consisted of 29 bedsitters and 117 two-bedroom flats on a site bounded by Captain Cook Crescent, Stuart Street, Light Street, Evans Crescent and the boundaries of St Paul's Cathedral, the Russian Embassy and private flats. The units are spread over 12 separate blocks varying in height from two to four storeys plus part basement with some blocks raised on concrete frames to provide covered car parking. The central open space between the blocks contained additional car parking and drying areas however landscaping was minimal. There is little evidence of any strong concept, architectural style or a considered approach to site planning in the design of these buildings despite being designed in the highly regarded office of Spencer, Hanson and Partner.

Gowrie Court, Narrabundah, constructed in 1959, broke away from the 'donut' planning model partly due to the site not being surrounded by roadways. It demonstrates some architectural influences of the Post-War International style such as low pitched roof and overall cubist form. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014, p.56)

Gowrie Court consisted of 72 two-bedroom units in series of separate, three-storey blocks that ran parallel with each other for optimum solar orientation. This was in contrast to the early 1950s flats that were two-storeys high, and

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flanked all four boundaries of their sites regardless of individual orientation. Other evidence of the shift to a more modern, International Style-influenced approach is exemplified by the very low pitch to the roof, accentuating the rectangular, cubist form of the blocks. In another modernist tendency, the crisp, planar form is offset visually by the white-painted cantilevered balconies, which regularly punctuate the main facades.

Lachlan Court, Barton also constructed in 1959 was of interest for its use of 'no-fines' concrete in place of typical load bearing brickwork. The complex consisted of 118 bedsitters over four separate buildings, one one-bedroom caretakers' cottage, a restaurant, central laundrette and 41 garages on a site bounded by Brisbane Avenue, Macquarie Street, Darling Street and National Circuit. In 1999 Lachlan Court was sold by the ACT Government and subsequently demolished for redevelopment.

The construction of the Red Hill Housing Precinct in 1961 demonstrated another shift in the planning layout of public housing towards the Post-War International style and were part of a group housing project, an idea discussed earlier by the NCPDC for new subdivisions, a similar scheme which would be evident in the future Northbourne Housing Precinct. This project consisted of a total of 145 dwellings in a variety of housing types including flats, bed-sitter units, houses and townhouses. The majority of the Precinct is bounded by La Perouse Street, Discovery Street, Monaro Crescent and Cygnet Crescent with a smaller section being located outside that perimeter on the other side of Cygnet Crescent. The nine blocks follow the gently sloping topography, street pattern on a symmetrical, semi-formal, curved radial layout set out in a series of radial wings which results in a series of open spaces. The buildings however made no reference to the Post-War International style.

The NCD's construction of the Northbourne Housing Precinct, between 1959 – 1962 was a much more ambitious architectural undertaking along the avenue that was the main entrance to Canberra. This project established a significant difference to its predecessors in terms of the use of the variety of building types and group layouts, and proved more confident in its adoption of the Post-War International style. (Graham Brooks and Associates, 2014, p.57)

The Northbourne Housing Precinct stretches some 500 metres along Northbourne Avenue in Dickson and Lyneham and consists of five building types, comprising one, two, three and four storey buildings with variety of housing types including bachelor flats, two-storey paired houses and maisonettes. The Precinct was considered by the NCD as a 'gateway' marking the entrance into the National Capital. The prominence and consideration given to its landmark status were novel qualities in Canberra's public housing, as previous examples were primarily considered as a quick response to housing shortages.

Subsequent medium density public housing, such as Kanangra Court, Reid took a different approach to architectural and site planning.

Kanangra Court, Reid completed in 1965 demonstrated some domestic qualities of private houses associated with the Sydney Regional Style (1960- ) such as scale, footprint shape, massing, proportion of windows, detailing and building materials. Originally comprised of 118 bachelor flats over seven three-storey blocks, the flats has since been modified into two-bedroom flats. Bounded by Ainslie Avenue, Limestone Avenue, Allambie Street and Goren Street the buildings are set in an open landscaped area with covered carports and screened drying areas. Further information can be found under **The Planning and Development of Kanangra Court**.

By the mid 1970s demand for government housing in Canberra had dropped significantly. The Government decided that building large flat complexes exclusively for occupation by government housing tenants was over, and that low-cost housing should be developed for the increasing number of tenants on welfare and aged pensioners. (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.319).

Jerilderie Court, Reid completed in 1977 demonstrated this new phase in intent and design approach to public housing in Canberra. Developed in response to lobbying for low cost accommodation it was designed in response to a places' context rather than a conscious exercise in any specific architectural style. It contains a total of 62 dwellings within nine blocks ranging from two to three storeys in height. Dwelling types include three-bedroom townhouses, single-storey garden units, maisonettes and mews-style units with car parking provided at ground level under some blocks, in group carports and in open parking spaces. The units are bounded by Ainslie Avenue, Allambie Street, Doonkuna Street and Elimatta Street.

### The planning and development of Kanangra Court

Kanangra Court was constructed from 1962 - 1965 to coincide with the ongoing Department of Defence transfers, beginning in 1959 and continuing unabated through the 1960s. It was part of the NCDC's response to an increasing demand for flats for single people first noted at a meeting in February 1959 as an 'urgent need for more bachelor flats', and based on estimates of the likely demand both from the transfer program and increasing public service numbers. In the first wave of Defence transfers from 1959-63, 25% were single people, going to hostels or bachelor flats, rather than family housing (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.291)

At this time, too, the Public Service Broad and various government departments frequently raised staffing difficulties caused by people declining to come to Canberra because of housing shortages, and the Co-ordination and Steering Committee on the transfer of departments saw great demand for bachelor flats and hostel beds as well as family houses (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.291)

The bedsitting room 'bachelor flat' format of the first flat project of the NCDC period at Lachlan Court in Barton (consisting of 118 bedsitters in 1959) was repeated in the early 1960s at Condamine Court in Lyneham, and McPherson Court in O'Connor, with 142 bedsitters completed in 1963 (Wright, 2000, 61). The Kanangra Court bachelor flats project, initiated by NCDC in 1962 and completed in 1965, was distinct from these earlier 'repeat' projects in that it was specifically designed for the site by Sydney architects, Collard and Clarke (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.291-292)

While earlier examples of bedsitters had been included in flat projects, for example, the Stuart Flats (which included 29 bedsitters, completed in 1959) and the Northbourne Housing Precinct (which included 28 bedsitters in 1962) – these were as part of mixed housing developments, rather than solely consisting of bachelor flats.

The NCDC promoted the modern style of flat living for singles exemplified by the Kanangra Court project in an attempt to attract rising young public servants to Canberra. The *Australian News and Information Bureau* placed stories and photographs in leading Sydney and Melbourne papers as part of a publicity drive in the mid 1960s (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.292)

Publicity of the time hailed its efficient use of space and 'up to date' qualities (National Archives of Australia, A7973).

The siting of the new bachelor flats at this location in Reid in 1965 added to the established use of both sides of Ainslie Avenue for government housing projects in the form of large blocks of flats of various types.

The site of the building is also of historical interest as being adjacent to the site of the original Ainslie Post Office. A bronze plaque is attached to the rear of the carport along Allambee Street to commemorate this.

### Site Planning and the Sydney Regional Style

The approach taken by Collard Clarke and Jackson to the problem of providing bachelor flats in Canberra is a departure from previous site planning configurations. Instead of aligning blocks with the street frontages, they took a different approach to site planning and organisation: one that, in spirit, owed something to the domestic qualities of private houses associated with the Sydney Regional Style colloquially known as the 'Sydney School'.

Sydney Regional Style is greatly influenced by the qualities of the sites on which the properties are built, which are often sloping, rocky and well-treed. 'Typically, a house would descent its hillside site in a series of split levels covered by roof planes approximately parallel to the slope of the land. This configuration helped to produce interior spaces of greater richness and complexity...' (Apperly, Irving & Reynolds, 1995, pg 240)

Collard Clarke and Jackson achieved these domestic qualities by grouping the flats into separate blocks that approximated, in area and building footprint, the scale of a domestic house. The blocks were also assembled as a series of 'L'-shapes, or 'zig-zags', connected by circulation stairwells screened with pierced face brickwork and extruded up to three storeys high. These domestic qualities are further reinforced by the choice of building materials, being white painted, bagged, load-bearing brick walls with timber-framed grey cement tiled roofs and detailing such as window proportions and small balconies. (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.298-299)

Sited for optimum northern orientation, the staggered blocks step down the sloping site resulting in a small domestic

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scaled development. This layout has resulted in better privacy between blocks and internally the split-level stair landings result in only two flats opening off any landing. (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.299).

The aspects of the Late Twentieth Century Sydney Regional Style (1960 - ), also known colloquially as the 'Sydney School', Kanangra Court partially demonstrates include:.

- asymmetrical massing;
- tiled skillion roof; and
- exposed rafters.

However, its ability to fully demonstrate the style is diminished by:

- the domestic scale and pitch of the roof, restricting its ability to strongly reflect the slope of the land;
- the presence of pitched roofs, rather than primarily skillion roofs;
- absence of any flat roofed areas;
- absence of clerestory window;
- absence of any timber post-and-beam elements;
- absence of exposed roof beams, Philip Leeson Architects (2011) report the ceilings to be painted sheet plaster;
- absence of timber decks;
- absence of 'clinker' brick walling;
- absence of painted brick, the external walls have been bagged and painted;
- absence of boarded stud walls, Philip Leeson Architects (2011) report the interior walls to be brickwork, rendered and painted;
- absence of stained or oiled timber, original stained timber elements, such as doors and windows have been replaced with powder coated aluminium doors and window frames;
- absence of timber awning sash; and the
- absence of timber screens.

## DESCRIPTION

Kanangra Court is located on a rectangular site bounded by Ainslie Avenue, Limestone Avenue, Allambee Street and Gooreen Street, in the suburb of Reid. Originally designed as 118 bachelor flats and one one-bedroom flat, Kanangra Court consists of seven three-storey blocks set in an open landscaped area, with covered carports and screened drying areas provided along the Allambee Street boundary. Kanangra Court has since been converted and now consists of 42 two-bedroom flats and 36 bedsits.

The court is grouped into separate blocks assembled as a series of "L"-shapes, or "zig-zags", connected by circulation stairwells screened with pierced face brickwork and extruded up to three storeys high.

### Landscaping

The original planning layout is generally unaltered from the initial construction, with the exception of recent landscaping works including new paths and paved areas, new drying courts and the introduction of a central community garden. (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011, p.306)

The landscaped area contains paths that connect each block, grassed areas, paving, seating and open car parks.

The block contains a variety of trees, however there is a noticeable lack of larger trees. Species include Eucalypts (*Eucalyptus mannifera*), Elms (*Ulmus procera*), Silver Birch (*Betula* spp), Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* spp) and Flowering Pear (*Pyrus* spp). There is also a strong presence of shrub and understory planting throughout the block with low *Pittosporum* hedges and banks of *Lomandra* and *Dianella* planted along the perimeter of the site.

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### Physical condition and integrity

An external inspection of Kanangra Court was conducted by ACT Heritage on 8 January 2015. Over the place remains relatively intact in terms of physical condition and integrity in relation to extant buildings and planning layout. The physical condition of the buildings and its landscape relating to general maintenance however is considered to be good.

Kanangra Court displays layers of maintenance work most likely as a result of periodic inspections, accidental damage, vandalism, weather and the expected wear and tear. Maintenance appears to have been conducted in a sympathetic manner. Areas require further maintenance work, as identified by Philip Leeson Architects in 2011 and confirmed by ACT Heritage in 2014 include:

Some roof areas sagging;

Minor settlement cracks in brickwork;

Painted surfaces require attention;

Water stained balcony slab edges;

Water damage to eave soffits; and

Some deflection to timber carport beams.

Several alterations have been made to the buildings (Philip Leeson Architects, 2011), including:

Original stained timber replaced with powder coated aluminium door and window frames;

Pairs of original studio flats modified to create one bedroom flats and consequent changes to kitchens and bathrooms; and

Extensive upgrading to landscape elements – paving, lighting, walls, entry posts, letterboxes, fencing.

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SITE PLAN

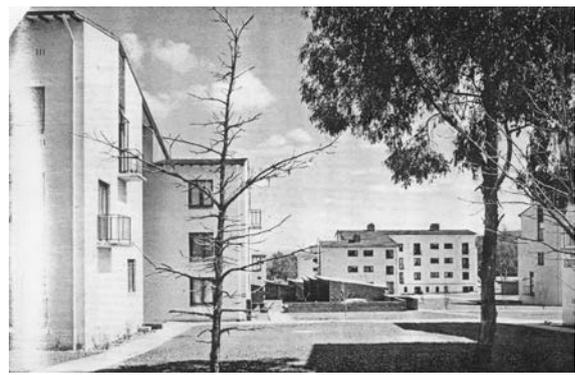


Image 1 Kanangra Court, Reid, nominated boundary (Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)

IMAGES



**Image 2** Early photographs of Kanangra Court (Source: David Moore, *Architecture Australia*, February 1967)



**Image 3** Early photographs of Kanangra Court (Source: David Moore, *Architecture Australia*, February 1967)



**Image 4** Elevation demonstrating loss of timber paneling above windows (Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)



**Image 5** Windows and doors have been replaced with aluminium frames (Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)



**Image 6** View to Canberra City down Ainslie Avenue (Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)



**Image 7** Pedestrian access (Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)

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**Image 8** Elevation demonstrating exposed rafters  
(Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)



**Image 9** The buildings within the landscaped grounds  
(Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)



**Image 10** Concrete and metal balustrade balconies  
(Source: ACT Heritage, 2014)

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### REFERENCES

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