

INTERIM HERITAGE PLACES REGISTER

CITATION

Name of Place: AIR DISASTER MEMORIAL, ACT

LOCATION OF PLACE: Fairbairn Pine Plantation, Pialligo Avenue Avenue, 5km east-south-east of Pialligo, comprising the memorial and associated structures and plantings

Section and Block Suburb: Rural Block 602, D P 554

Area bounded by: The Memorial is located within the Pialligo Pine Plantation, and the suggested curtilage of the area is that enclosed by the concrete kerbing.

FEATURES INTRINSIC TO THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE:

The features intrinsic to the heritage significance of the place are:

- The Air Disaster Memorial has historic significance marking the spot of one of Australia's national war-time disasters.
 - It also commemorates the untimely death of the chief administrators of Australia's war effort.
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Air Disaster Memorial is significant for its association with the 1940 aeroplane crash resulting in the deaths of its passengers who included three Commonwealth Cabinet Ministers and the Chief of the General Staff. The loss of these senior Commonwealth figures had a significant impact on the Government (Criterion A4).

The Memorial is erected on the actual site of the crash, and the eight eucalypt trees around it enhance the experience of the site (Criterion E.1).

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS:

In accordance with s.54(1) of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991, the following requirements are identified as essential to the conservation of the heritage significance of this place. These requirements are prepared to implement the following conservation policy for the place:

Any action relating to these requirements is development for the purposes of the Act and will require approval prior to undertaking the activity. To undertake development without such approval may be an offence.

1. Requirements Relating to the Building

- 1.1
- 1.2

2. Requirements Relating to the Setting

- 2.1

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

In assessing this place for the interim Heritage Places Register, the Council recommends that the following actions and activities should be undertaken which will enhance the heritage values of the place. They are made as recommendations and have no legal effect.

- 1.
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DOCUMENT HISTORY

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| 1. | date | Draft citation considered by ACT Heritage Council at Meeting (number) |
| 2. | date | Draft citation released for public comment |
| 3. | date | Revised citation for ACT Heritage Council Meeting (number) |
| 4. | date | Gazetted in an interim Heritage Places Register |

Attachment A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

A large granite monolith, 2 metres wide supported by 2 smaller stones at the back, form the cairn. The cairn is embedded in concrete, surrounded by a concrete kerb wall with a diameter of 5 metres. The space between is filled with granite chips. A plaque, made in Melbourne by Aron Engraving is centrally placed on the cairn bearing an inscription to:

"Brigadier the Hon G. Street MP The Minister of State for Army and Repatriation.

The Hon Sir Henry Gullett, MP Vice President of the Executive Council

The Hon J Fairbairn MP Minister for Air and Civil Aviation

Lt Gen Sir Brudenell White Chief of General Staff

Mr RE Elford Private Secretary to the Minister for Air

Lt Colonel Thornwaite, Staff Officer attached to Chief of General Staff

Flt Lt RH Hitchcock pilot

P/O Weisener, assistant pilot

Cpl JF Palmer wireless operator.

Aircraftsman Crossdale fitter " - all of whom were killed at the spot.

The erection of the monument was supervised by the Department of Works and the plaque was made by Aron Engraving, Melbourne.

Ten people including 3 Commonwealth Ministers, and the Chief of the General Staff, were killed on 13 August 1940, when their RAAF Lockheed Hudson crashed while circling prior to landing at Fairbairn Airport. The plane was bringing the Ministers and high officials from Melbourne for an important Cabinet meeting when it nose-dived into the hill and subsequently burst into flames. The tragedy assumed the proportions of a national disaster in view of the loss of the chief administrators of Australia's war effort.

A Memorial was suggested in Parliament by Dr Maloney (Labor) on 14 August 1940. However it was not until Dame Annabel Rankin wrote to the then Minister for Air, William McMahon, asking consideration be given to the request by relatives of Sir Brundenell White that a small cairn be erected at the point of the crash in memory of those who lost their lives, that the suggestion was given serious consideration. The request, in January 1952, was referred to Prime Minister Menzies, who was Chair of the National Memorials Committee, and very supportive of the project.

The cairn, and an associated plaque to be placed at Fairbairn Airport, were not supported by the National Capital Planning and Development Committee who felt that a plaque marking an air disaster was psychologically inappropriate at the airport!

A cairn and memorial plaque on site was approved by WS Kent Hughes, as was a memorial plaque on one of the buildings at the civilian airport, on 9 February 1952. The plaque at the civilian however never eventuated.

The site of the crash had been marked with a cement peg at the time of the Coroner's inquiry in 1940 by surveyor LCA Hope. It was on a portion of the RMC firing field and manoeuvre area (formerly block 60 of the lease operated by DA Cameron, who subsequently disposed of his interests to WA Taylor).

The permission of the next of kin of all victims was obtained and a design for the proposed memorial forwarded to them all. The concept was priced at 250 pounds in April 1958.

Between April 1958 and August 1958, however, a change in proposal occurred. On 7 August 1958, a granite monolith was removed from the site of the Ainslie Rex Hotel to the site of the disaster, and became what is now known as the Air Disaster Memorial.

Wreaths were laid at the cairn on 13 August 1960, the 20th anniversary of the disaster, in a simple ceremony attended by the Prime Minister Menzies and 20 others. A National Memorial Service for the victims of the disaster was held on 16 August 1960 at St Paul's, Melbourne, as well as at St John's, Canberra, and Westminster Abbey, London.

Eight eucalypt trees form a loose semi-circular shape round the monument and enhance the setting. They are thought to be vestiges of the original heavily-wooded hilltop.

2. STATUS OF PLACE AT NOMINATION DATE:

The plaque is in good condition although it is not original. There have been several plaques provided through time because of theft or vandalism. The stone is in fair to good condition as it has suffered some exfoliation. The surrounding landscape is in generally poor condition, especially the area planted with shrubs.

3. BACKGROUND:

4. RELEVANT PRINCIPAL NATIONAL HISTORIC THEMES:

Members of War Cabinet, Ministers Fairbairn, Gullett and Street and Chief of General Staff.

5. ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA SPECIFIED IN SCHEDULE 2 OF THE LAND (PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT) ACT 1991

Under Section 56 the criteria for the assessment of the heritage significance of places are:

- (i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure, or representing a new achievement of its time;**
- (ii): a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;**
- (iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost, or is of exceptional interest;**
- (iv): a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations;**
- (v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type;**
- (vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class;**
- (vii): a place which has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history;**
- (viii) a place which represents the evolution of a natural landscape, including significant geological features, landforms, biota or natural processes;**
- (ix) a place which is a significant habitat or locality for the life cycle of native species; for rare, endangered or uncommon species; for species at the limits of their natural range; or for district occurrences of species;**

- (x) **a place which exhibits unusual richness, diversity or significant transitions of flora, fauna or natural landscapes and their elements; or**
- (xi) **a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site.**

6. **REFERENCES:**

Author Title date publication

1. 'Canberra Times', 13 August 1990
2. 'Canberra Times', 14 August 1940
3. 'Canberra Times', 15 August 1940
4. Ritchie, John (ED), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 12
5. Melbourne University Press, 1990