

NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER OF SIGNIFICANT PLACES

CITATION

NAME OF PLACE: THE CANBERRA CIVIC SQUARE AND THE BUILDINGS THAT FORM THE SQUARE.

LOCATION OF PLACE: London Circuit, Civic

Section and Block Suburb: Section 19 Civic (see maps attached)

Block 1 - Theatre and Link

Block 2 - North Building

Block 3 - South Building

Block 6 - Access to North Building

Block 7 - City Square.

Curtilage: The square is formed by the North and South Buildings, the Canberra Theatre, Playhouse Theatre and the Link Gallery, including the sculptures and fountain contained within the square.

FEATURES INTRINSIC TO THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE:

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The City Square and the buildings which form it were the result of "the first acknowledgment, in the form of funds, by a Government," of the recognition of significance of cultural activities in the lives of the people" (The Canberra Times June 22 1965) and Wilford Holland declared on the theatre opening (The Canberra Times June 22 1965) that this complex signalled what is called "the secondary stage of a community's growth The Albert Hall (1928) and the Capitol Theatre Manuka (1927), both on the south side of the flood plain (sheep paddock) had been the cultural centre of the capital's life. The building of the City Square Complex signified the intention of the Federal Government to develop the node point of the triangle as the location for local administrative life of the city in civic, in accordance with the Griffin plan. The decision to build the lake and the complex of buildings that form the City Square heralded and symbolised this commitment of Government to the city centre.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS:

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:

1. Requirements Relating to the Building

1.1 Not applicable

1.2

2. Requirements Relating to the Setting

2.1

2.2

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

In assessing this place for the interim Heritage Places Register, the Trust recommends that the following actions and activities should be undertaken which will enhance the heritage values of the place.

DOCUMENT HISTORY

1. date Draft citation considered by Council at Meeting (number)
2. date Revised citation for Council Meeting (number).....APPROVED/NOT APPROVED
3. date Submitted for inclusion in interim Heritage Places Register

"Nomination - awaiting initial evaluation (Historic) nominations."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

The City Square lies on the axis between City Hill and Mount Ainslie. The City Square (76m x 61m) around which the Civic Offices have been built is capable of holding more than 5,000 people on ceremonial occasions. The central feature of the paved square is a 945 square metre pool from which numerous jets of water, set around the perimeter effect a coronet pattern (Architect Australia December 1962). The water height is automatically controlled to maintain a constant height during variation in wind forces. Overflowing water from the pool can be collected through the perimeter drains and recycled through floor and ceiling pipes to cool the building in warm weather. Along either side of the square are planting of Chinese Elms, providing shade over seating.

On the upper terrace of the square eight flag poles are placed to fly the flags of the states. The Canberra flag and national flags are flown from poles opposite the square on London Circuit.

Two sides of the Square are formed by the North and South Buildings. These buildings are of reinforced concrete construction with copper roofs, clad externally with precast white quartz panels separated by aluminium windows. The ground floors of both buildings are set back to provide a colonnade concourse to all sides, continuing the form established by the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings.

The City Hill edge of the Square is formed by the Canberra Theatre and Playhouse Theatre buildings and the link between them. The free form of the fly tower of the Theatre and the square tower of the Playhouse Auditorium are accentuated by a white render which contrasts with the dark coloured load-bearing brickwork of the auditoriums. The copper roofing matches the nearby North and South Office Buildings. (Architecture Australia December 1967.).

The 1200 seat Canberra Theatre was designed and equipped as a flexible structure permitting a broad range of different performing arts. The large stage, 60 feet (18m) deep with an additional 5 feet (1.5m) from the house curtain to the stage edge is sprung of rubber pads to further, increase the theatres uses to include those of ballet and dance. The stage is backed by a cyclorama, 34 feet (10m) back from the house curtain.

The 400-500 seat Playhouse Theatre was designed for use by local organisations (repertory, philharmonic society) and for small visiting professional or amateur theatrical groups.

The Exhibition Gallery was for staging art shows and other functions and available for meetings and receptions. (NCDC Planning Report 1961.)

HISTORY

The contract was let in August 1959 for the construction of the Civic Offices and City Square. The work included two buildings on the axis between City Hill and Mount Ainslie and placed on either side of what was to be the main City Square.

The offices were to accommodate the staff of the Department of Interior that were concerned with the administration of Canberra.

The buildings were 3 storeyed, reinforced concrete construction externally clad with precast, white quartzite plasters between aluminium window panels. The ground floor was set back to provide a colonnaded concourse to the Square and to London Circuit. The columns of the concourse were faced with mosaic tiles. The complex was the first commitment to public building by the Government in Civic.

The offices have fulfilled the role of the centre of the Administration and Local Government, the Advisory Council (mid 1960-1974), The Legislative Assembly (1974-1978) (Sparke), ACT House of Assembly (1978-1988).

There was an upper terrace where it was proposed to construct an auditorium and exhibition building. These proceeded in 1965 and the theatre complex became, and continues to be the centre for the performing arts in the ACT and surrounding areas of NSW.

In the 25 years since the Canberra Theatre Complex has been built the following modifications have occurred :

- 1970's : early extensions to the North & South Buildings (\$2.5m) completing the square plan form with, central courtyards and with service entries from the rear,.
- 1979 : The enclosure of the 4500 square feet (418 square metre) colonnade to form a box office, reception foyer and display area connecting to the Canberra Theatre.
- 1982 : The addition of an administration and rehearsal block at the rear of the Canberra Theatre, designed by Yuncken and Freeman. Extensions to the Playhouse Theatre, and the conversion of the multipurpose room into a restaurant.
- 1988: Major refurbishment of the complex (\$500,000), repainting of the interior, replacement of carpet & the original plastic seats replaced by wool covered seats. (The Canberra Times February 8 1988).

MAJOR ALTERATIONS IN 1997-98? (Edna A.)

SOCIAL VALUE

The Square continues to fulfil its public function role, providing theatre and art space facilities, as well as a venue for public celebrations and gatherings. The theatre complex became and continues to be the centre for the performing arts in the ACT and the surrounding areas of NSW. The offices were conceived to be the seat of local Government for the City, and have fulfilled the role as the centre of the Administration and Local Government. The complex was the first commitment to public building in Civic by Government.

2. STATUS OF PLACE AT NOMINATION DATE:

Application to classify - "Nomination awaiting initial evaluation (Historic)"
Owner/Lessee: ACT and Federal Governments (area falls within the designated area).

3. BACKGROUND:

Builder Concrete Constructions (Canberra) Pty Ltd - Civic Offices (North & South Buildings) Stage 1 completed February 1961. Stage 2 1970? D A Constructions - Canberra Theatre Complex, completed June 24 1965 (Opening).

Architect: Yuncken & Freeman - City Square, North and South Buildings, Canberra and Playhouse Theatres.

Manufacturer/Designer Artworks: Tom Bass (1961) Ethos, The spirit of the community.
Classified. Robert Cook : Thespis, Coat of Arms, (over the main entrance to the North Building).

TECHNICAL VALUE

The rolled copper, used for the roof section of the Theatre were the longest copper roof trays produced in Australia at that time (The Australian, January 4 1965). The system of re-cycling water for cooling purposes was innovative and created a fountain innovation.

AESTHETIC VALUE

The complex is an example of modern public architecture and space. Located on the slope of one of Walter Burley Griffin's node points of the Parliamentary Triangle;-City Hill, and on the axis from City Hill to Mount Ainslie, the square is locked into the symbolic framework and the landscape elements of

that plan. The buildings and square have a symmetrical relationship with the law court buildings and square that form the end of University Avenue (mirrored on the other side of Northbourne Avenue). The form and massing are significant for this balance at the urban scale. The complex was designed as a whole and designed to not visually or physically interfere with the significance and importance of City Hill. The square has been cited in Krier "1988 Urban Space" as an excellent and acceptable form and function of a City Square. All elements, (buildings, pool, fountain, sculpture and landscape) contribute to the overall composition. The North and South Buildings translate the form of the retail Sydney and Melbourne buildings of the late 1920's into a modern aesthetic idiom and demonstrate the potential and flexibility of the form. The Theatre Complex is an example of functional-modern aesthetic. The pool is one of the largest in a Civic Square in Australia and is an important element in the Square.

It is typical of the 1960's construction of which the ACT has few examples. In terms of urban design the Civic Square had significance providing the termination of Ainslie Avenue.

4. RELEVANT PRINCIPAL NATIONAL HISTORIC THEMES:

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:

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