

Place Details

[Send Feedback](#)

Parliament House Vista Extension - Portal Buildings, Anzac Pde, Parkes, ACT, Australia

Photographs	None
List	Commonwealth Heritage List
Class	Historic
Legal Status	Listed place (22/06/2004)
Place ID	105474
Place File No	8/01/000/0497

Summary Statement of Significance

The Portal Buildings are important for their association with the push to transfer public servants from Melbourne to Canberra in the 1960s under the Liberal Government of Sir Robert Menzies. They are also important for their association with the consultancy of Sir William Holford and the views of the Senate Select Committee, which saw Canberra as a unified city in which background buildings in a monumental style functioned both as symbols of government and Australian unity. In this respect the Portal buildings are an expression of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) which adopted the views of Holford and the Senate, and interpreted them in terms of the formal composition of Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra, with its cumulative massing, axiality and avenues. (Criterion A.4 and criterion H.1)

(Themes: 4.2 Supplying urban services, 5.4 Working in offices, 7.5 Developing administrative structures and authorities)

As symbols of government, the monumental Portal Buildings are located on Walter Burley Griffin's land axis, Anzac Parade, and the municipal axis, Constitution Avenue, which defines the northern side of the Parliamentary Triangle area in the heart of Canberra, and frame the Parliamentary vista at its transition from land to lake. The Portal Buildings exhibit a monumental character through strongly modelled structural bays, emphasised by the vertical emphasis of the columns and the use of sandstone cladding to the structural elements of the elevations, and are important elements of Civic Design in the urban setting of Canberra. (Criterion E.1)

Designed by NCDC architect Gareth Roberts in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Works Chief Design Architect Richard Ure, the buildings clearly illustrate NCDC policy in the form and scale of the building envelopes which were determined by the NCDC architect, with the architectural expression developed by the consultant architect. The two buildings are important examples of this design process and the prevailing use in Canberra during the 1960s of the stripped classical interpretation of the International Style of architecture. (Criterion D.2)

Official Values

Criterion A Processes

The Portal Buildings are important for their association with the push to transfer public servants from Melbourne to Canberra in the 1960s under the Liberal Government of Sir Robert Menzies. They are also important for their association with the consultancy of Sir William Holford and the views of the Senate Select Committee, which saw Canberra as a unified city in which background buildings in a monumental style functioned both as symbols of government and Australian unity. In this respect the Portal buildings are an expression of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), which adopted the views of Holford and the Senate, and interpreted them in terms of the formal composition of Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra, with its cumulative massing, axiality and avenues.

Attributes

The building's use as public service offices, their monumental character and their relationship to ANZAC Parade and the Land Axis.

Criterion D Characteristic values

Designed by NCDC architect Gareth Roberts in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Works Chief Design Architect Richard Ure, the buildings clearly illustrate NCDC policy in the form and scale of the building envelopes which were determined by the NCDC architect, with the architectural expression developed by the consultant architect. The two buildings are important examples of this design process and the prevailing use in Canberra during the 1960s of the stripped classical interpretation of the International Style of architecture.

Attributes

The buildings' stripped classical interpretation of the International Style of architecture, plus their form and scale.

Criterion E Aesthetic characteristics

As symbols of government, the monumental Portal Buildings are located on Walter Burley Griffin's land axis, Anzac Parade, and the municipal axis, Constitution Avenue, which defines the northern side of the Parliamentary Triangle area in the heart of Canberra, and frame the Parliamentary vista at its transition from land to lake. The Portal Buildings exhibit a monumental character through strongly modelled structural bays, emphasised by the vertical emphasis of the columns and the use of sandstone cladding to the structural elements of the elevations, and are important elements of Civic Design in the urban setting of Canberra.

Attributes

The aesthetic values of the individual buildings evident in strongly modelled structural bays, the vertical emphasis of the columns and the use of sandstone cladding, plus their paired relationship and framing of the Parliamentary Vista evident in their monumental character either side of the land axis.

Criterion H Significant people

The Portal Buildings are important for their association with the push to transfer public servants from Melbourne to Canberra in the 1960s under the Liberal Government of Sir Robert Menzies. They are also important for their association with the consultancy of Sir William Holford and the views of the Senate Select Committee, which saw Canberra as a unified city in which background buildings in a monumental style functioned both as symbols of government and Australian unity. In this respect the Portal buildings are an expression of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) which adopted the views of Holford and the Senate, and interpreted them in terms of the formal composition of Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra, with its cumulative massing, axiality and avenues.

Attributes

Their role as public service offices, their monumental character, their massing and their axial location within the Parliamentary Vista's formal landscape composition.

Description

History:

Walter Burley Griffin's winning design of May 1912 for the new Federal Capital embodied elements of the Beaux Arts style with its formal composition of axes, avenues, mountains and artificial lakes in a large scale piece of ensemble planning. The triangle was also a basic element on which the whole city scheme was built. In his spatial design Griffin created three urban centres connected by three main avenues into an equilateral triangle; the Government centre with Capital Hill, the Municipal Centre with Mt Vernon (City Hill) and the market areas with Mt Pleasant and Mt Russell (today this triangle is recognised as the National Triangle). The northern side of the triangle (Constitution Avenue) was to become the municipal axis. Dominant urban axes were defined by the line connecting Mt Ainslie with Bimberi (the Land axis) as opposed to the water axis extending at 90 degrees in the general direction of the Molonglo River which was intended to become a chain of lakes or water features. Griffin's design utilised the Beaux Arts principle of employing buildings to accentuate axes and vistas; in Griffin's words 'cumulative massing'.

The future sites of the Portal Buildings were clearly defined on Griffins plans of 1911, 1912 and 1913 at the intersection of the municipal and land axes, with massive buildings accentuating and framing the transition from land to water. Griffins plan found expression under the FCAC and FCC in the years to 1930 with the new Provisional Parliament House opened in 1927. Development slowed during the Inter-War and Post -War years only to be revitalised under the Liberal Government of Sir Robert Menzies in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The NCDC Act of 1957 established a Commission charged with carrying out the planning, development and construction of the City of Canberra. The year 1958 saw the transfer of Melbourne staff including Public Service and Defence staff. Contemporary with the formation of the Commission in 1958 was the report of British town planner Sir William Holford which stressed the need for Canberra to become a 'unified city' with a bold design. The values propagated by the Senate Select Committee and Holford included the need the develop a 'park like landscape ... in the heart of Canberra, in which monumental buildings functioned both as symbols of government and of Australian unity'. The visual design of this landscape, the views along the main axial lines and avenues as well as the grouping of monumental buildings were considered to be the elements upon which the success of Canberra as a city of world standing depended.

Holford's recommendations included siting the future houses of parliament on the lakeside and developing two monumental buildings between a new road (Parkes Way) and the future lake shore, south of Constitution Avenue. The new road (Parkes Way) was adopted by the NCDC but six massive buildings were to be sited south of, and along, the line of Constitution Avenue. The NCDCs acceptance of the Holford vision set the design context for Anzac Park East and Anzac Park West Buildings-the Portal Buildings. The Portal Buildings were erected during the first phase of major construction of public and administrative buildings initiated by the NCDC and in this respect are contemporary with the Law Courts of the ACT, the Royal Australian Mint, the Russell Offices (Defence), Civic Square and the Canberra Theatre.

The NCDC was able to select the most modern town planning techniques and apply them long before other Australian cities. Peter Harrison, Canberra's chief town planner with the NCDC in 1959 believed in the importance of the landscape to the developing capital. NCDC policy was that NCDC architects were to determine the envelope of major buildings, taking advice from William Holford's office and an advisory panel. New planners and architects were to be instrumental in the process.

In 1961 architect and planner Gareth Roberts, formerly on Holford's staff in Britain, was the NCDC officer responsible for further developing the concept for the Anzac Park buildings with the consultants, the Commonwealth Department of Works led by Chief Design Architect Richard Ure. This was in contrast to the use of private firms for other major projects such as the ACT Law Courts. Constitution Avenue and the broad framework of Anzac Parade were implemented in part by 1954 but the construction of Parkes Way in the mid 1960s effectively defined the southern boundary to the site and effectively defined the lake shore. Gareth Roberts and Australian architect and landscape architect Richard Clough had collaborated on the design of Anzac parade and its architectural elements. Full expression of the parameters defining the site of the Portal Buildings had taken place under the NCDC in 1964 when Lake Burley Griffin reached its predicted level. Anzac Parade was officially opened on 25 April 1965 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Gallipoli. The two portal buildings, Anzac Park East complete by 1965 and Anzac Park West complete by 1966, flanked the vista from the War Memorial to the Provisional Parliament House. The contractor for the two buildings was Concrete Constructions. Anzac Park East was occupied by the Bureau of Mineral Resources until 1997. The Department of Defence continues to occupy Anzac Park West.

Physical description:

The Portal Buildings are almost mirror images in plan, scale, form and site layout with primary entrances and addresses to Anzac Avenue. A major characteristic is their symmetry about the Land axis. Both buildings sit in a

park-like landscape at the southern end of Anzac Parade and make an important contribution to the vista along Anzac Parade. In their location the two buildings clearly articulate the major junction of Anzac Parade and Parkes Avenue and illustrate the NCDCs policy of placing monumental buildings in a park-like landscape. The adoption of Parkes Way as an expression of the post-war dominance of the motor vehicle however clearly reduced the importance of Constitution Avenue in favour of the newly introduced traffic route of Parkes Way. Each of the two Portal buildings was executed in the International Style of the early 1960s and reflects the Stripped Classical style employed in other urban complexes at this time in Canberra.

Each building consists of two simple rectangular forms, Blocks 1 & 2, arranged on a T-plan. Block(s) 2 are parallel to Constitution Avenue with Block(s) 1 parallel to Anzac Parade. Each complex is entered at Block 1 from Anzac Parade and the car parking areas with secondary entrances in Block 2. Anzac Park West employs a single corridor in block 1 and a central core and two corridors in Block 2. The entrances are glazed lobbies set flush with the facade with access via a granite faced concrete staircase protected by a concrete canopy. The structural system of both buildings is based on concrete encased steel columns, with drop panel concrete slab floors and a reinforced concrete shear wall bracing system. The structural bay width of 20 feet gave modular and structural economy; Each building comprises a combination of 5 (Constitution Avenue) and 6 (Anzac Parade) standard floors above a partially excavated basement plinth and is capped by a screened parapet level at the roof. Structural bays are strongly modelled by the vertical emphasis given to the columns. The first floor perimeter beam, roof slab perimeter beam, parapet beam and all columns are clad with sandstone slabs. Above the first floor perimeter beam terrazzo infill frames articulate the window openings. Precast exposed aggregate spandrel panels and extruded aluminium windows complete the strong rectilinear treatment of wall infill panels. The roof level is expressed in the detailing of the parapet with vertical mullions reflecting those of the infill panels below. Full storey height aluminium mullions are employed at ground floor level in contrast to the precast concrete in the upper floors. The basement is clad with grey-black reconstructed granite panels incorporating ventilation openings. The roof is covered with coated steel decking fixed to a timber frame mounted on steel legs above the concrete roof slab.

The western Portal Building includes the West Portal Cafeteria (File No. 8/1/0/497) in its landscape setting.

History Not Available

Condition and Integrity

Integrity:

Main entrances modified for disabled access. The main entrances have also been extended by the addition of a larger air lock and automatic doors.

Physical condition:

Remedial work was undertaken in 1986. The buildings appear to be in reasonable condition for their age.

Location

About 4ha, at Parkes, comprising: 1) the Anzac Parade East Building area which is bounded by Parkes Way, Anzac Parade, Constitution Avenue and Wendouree Drive, and 2) the Anzac Parade West Building area which is bounded by Parkes Way, Anzac Parade, Constitution Avenue and in the north west a line joining ACT Standard Grid points 211575mE 603020mN and 211630mE 603125mN.

Bibliography

Fischer KF Canberra Myths and Models, Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg 1984

Sparke E, Canberra 1954-1980, AGPS 1988

Australian Construction Services, Conservation Plan for the Portal Buildings, Anzac Park East and West, for AEM, 1994.

Report Produced Tue Aug 23 09:03:32 2016