

Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter

Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R014

Name of Place: Reid Housing Precinct

Other/Former Names: Reid Urban Conservation Area

Address: Sections 15-18, Sections 34 – 38, Section 39 Blocks 3 & 5, Section 40 Block 1 and adjacent road reservations bounded by Anzac Park, Limestone Avenue, Allambee Street, Currong Street, Coranderrk Street and Booroondara Street.

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	ACT Register
Date of Listing:	1984	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	1	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Arts & Crafts, Mediterranean

Date of Layout:	1918	Planner and Architects:	Walter Burley & Marion Mahony Griffin
Date of Design:	1924		John Sulman
	1925		Federal Capital Commission architects under H.M. Rolland
	1930s		Dept of Interior architects under E.H Henderson
Construction Period:	1925-27	Client/Owner/Lessee:	FCC, Dept of Interior and others
	1930	Builders:	Bruce, Eden & Griffiths, Bankstown NSW

Statement of Significance

The Reid housing precinct is a singularly important part of the residential history of Canberra. It was one of the first Australian suburbs to be built on garden city precepts reflecting early 20th century planning thought and practice.

The layout of the precinct is significant primarily because it embodies the garden city planning ideals of the early 20th century. As modified by John Sulman and the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, it is one of the few residential areas included in Walter Burley & Marion Mahony Griffin's winning design for the federal capital.

The planning layout combines early 20th century garden city aesthetic, social planning and town planning ideals into a definable and coherent plan. It reflects the innovative town planning and landscape planning ideas and practice of the Griffins, Sulman and Thomas Weston, Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens.

The suburb of Reid and the 1920s Federal Capital Commission houses also have historical importance, as they provided accommodation for the first cohort of public servants transferred to Canberra in readiness for the opening of the provisional Parliament House in 1927. They are also a significant part of the first phase of public housing in Canberra. The 1930s Department of Interior houses complement this initial group of houses and continue the realisation of the initial garden city planning concept for the suburb.

The precinct is a key example of integrated residential planning and landscape planning, reflecting the early development of the Australian Federal Capital in Canberra. The houses are deliberately grouped with the

streets and two central gardens in a formal relationship which is unique to Canberra. The development and management of Reid since the 1930s has been consistent with the original garden suburb concept and subsequent architectural development has been integrated with the historical setting.

The social values of Reid are well established and important in the historical development of the precinct in accordance with the social planning ideals of the time. The Reid Residents' Association was the first such group to be formed in Canberra. Its healthy survival typifies the strong community feeling that maintains the values of the precinct and embodies the early social planning ideals fundamental to the precinct's creation. The pre-school (which commenced as a mothercraft centre), St John the Baptist Anglican Church and the Reid Uniting Church are also important historical components of the social fabric of Reid.

As a garden city and a planned capital, Canberra is of primary historical importance at both national and international levels. Residential areas make up most of the city's fabric; their management and conservation are fundamental to the maintenance of Canberra's historic values.ⁱ The Reid precinct is a key surviving exemplar demonstrating the realization of garden city planning and design principles.

Description

The Reid housing precinct is one of several early Canberra suburbs, which include the heritage precincts of Alt Crescent, Barton, Blandfordia 5, Braddon, Corroboree Park, Forrest, Kingston/Griffith and Wakefield Gardens, that collectively and individually demonstrate the early principles of garden city planning. 'Garden City' planning, in combination with American 'City Beautiful' principles, underpinned the initial planning of Canberra by the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC), Federal Capital Commission (FCC) and the Department of Interior (DOI) between 1920 and World War II.

The philosophy behind garden city planning was to create healthy working and living environments for urban residents. It developed internationally through the early 20th century; many of the garden city principles were integral to the Griffins' winning design for the new Federal Capital of Australia. Garden city planning has evolved to become the basis of professional town planning practice, and Canberra reflects this progressive evolution. Canberra's heritage precincts demonstrate key characteristics of the garden city philosophy, which has followed a continuous process of rationalisation to suit changing lifestyles since WWII.

The heritage precincts also demonstrate historical and social aspects of the detailed planning and construction of early Canberra by the FCAC, FCC and DOI. The separation of Canberra's suburbs and precincts into segregated socio-economic classes, however, was a departure from the garden city philosophy of combining social classes together.

The influences of early planning philosophy, including social segregation, and the urgent need for large public housing estates are reflected in the ordered layout and aesthetic unity of the precincts. Blocks and dwellings within each precinct are of comparable size to accommodate government employees of a similar class, and the dwellings are repetitions of a limited number of designs. In many instances the layout of buildings, fences and public landscaping for entire sections was planned and constructed as a single project. Large rear gardens reflect the planners' intention to provide opportunities for residents to grow fruit and vegetables in the face of critical shortages of locally available fresh produce.

The precincts demonstrate a mix of international architectural styles, including 'Arts & Crafts', 'Federation', 'Interwar Californian Bungalow' and 'Interwar Georgian Revival', whilst reflecting the trend of the interwar period towards the subtle or minimal decoration as a precursor to Modernism and in contrast to the ornamentation of the previous Victorian and Federation periods. The architectural character of the precincts is also valued for its high degree of aesthetic unity and demonstration of technical innovation in the design of low-density public housing subdivisions for the period.ⁱ

The 1920s FCC houses in the Reid precinct were designed in accordance with the mainstream Australian domestic architecture of its time. The Spanish Mission style was generally more popular in Sydney than in Melbourne; the reverse was true of Georgian Revival. Both styles were more obvious at the design stage than in the houses that were eventually built.

Nine different types of houses were built, unified by their consistent siting and setback, and by the consistent use of materials, details, and architectural elements. The relatively high ceilings and the small footprint of the dwellings makes them appear to be smaller than they are; this adds to their appeal for current residents. In general, the houses were built to a higher standard of finish and detail than other public housing of the time. The elimination of the front hall, while common in American houses at the time, was criticized by the first occupants, many of whom closed the open verandahs to provide extra space.

The FCC houses are technically conservative; the use of traditional materials and details may be one reason for their generally good standard of maintenance today. Although precast columns are used in many houses, the use of steel windows was investigated but rejected during the design stage to save on construction costs. Houses face the street rather than the sun; Canberra's winter climate was underestimated, so sleep-outs were quickly glassed in soon after the first residents took up occupation.ⁱⁱ

The 1930s houses designed by the Department of Interior were built of solid brick, with timber floors, roof frame and tiled roofs. The 93 houses were based on 17 different designs with variations. Most were built between 1934 and 1936; the remainder filled the gaps between the completed houses. These dwellings are not as distinctive as the FCC houses. They are more likely to have been altered, and these alterations and additions are less likely to be subordinate in character to the original building. Nevertheless, they reinforce the character of the FCC housing and contribute to the historic value of the precinct.ⁱⁱⁱ

Approximately 30 houses in Reid have been privately built; they do not generally detract from the importance and character of the early 20th century houses.

The tennis courts and pavilion in Dirrawan Gardens are of considerable historical importance and have been a key focus of the social life of the precinct since their construction in the late 1920s.

The street tree planting in Reid reflects the ideas and advocacy of John Sulman. Single rows of one species predominate. Deciduous trees are used in the suburban streets; native species are mixed in along the perimeter streets of Limestone Avenue and Anzac Parade. Thomas Weston, who worked with both Griffin (1913-21) and Sulman (1921-24), selected the plant species, devised planting techniques and firmly established Canberra's landscape character by using trees to reinforce the street layout in the architects' plans.^{iv} His work was fundamental to the realization of their garden city concepts.

Condition

Most of the building additions and alterations in the precinct are sympathetic to the original materials of brick and stucco. Unsympathetic reconstruction is sufficiently isolated so that it doesn't destroy the precinct's overall integrity.

The rhythm and themes of the street tree plantings have been maintained when replanting has been carried out, using seed from the existing trees. This maintains the species provenance and its links to Thomas Weston's work. The general style of gardens reflects the garden suburb image with species variety and cottage garden style, although the declining popularity of hedges has resulted in some incongruous open front gardens.

Background/History

The suburb of Reid was named after the Australian politician Sir George Reid (1845 - 1918), the fourth Prime Minister of Australia. Most of the houses in the precinct were constructed in 1925–7 to provide housing for middle-ranking public servants prior to the opening of the provisional Parliament House in 1927.

With the date for the opening set for 1927, there was an urgent need to accommodate both government staff and workmen engaged in building city infrastructure and administrative facilities. A lack of private sector interest and capability forced the government itself to construct the major portion of new housing within Canberra throughout the 1920-40 period.

The Reid Methodist (now Canberra Korean Uniting) Church, built in 1927, was the first church built specifically for the new city of Canberra. The precinct contains privately built examples of the domestic architecture of Kenneth H Oliphant and other local architects. Oliphant was one of Canberra's first independent practising architects and his work has contributed notably to the urban architectural character of Canberra.

The public domain landscape was directed by Thomas Charles Weston, Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. The species used are typical of Weston's choices of planting for Canberra.

The Reid Pre-School, built in 1944 and opened in 1945 as a mothercraft centre, was developed through community interest and effort and still provides a focal point for parents living in the area. The tennis courts and pavilion in Dirrawan Gardens also form a continuing focal point for social life and were constructed during the early development phase of the newly established suburb of Reid.

The Reid Residents (originally Progress) Association was formed in 1944. It demonstrates the strong community feeling in the precinct, which continues to the present. The RRA is still very active in promoting

the appreciation of the suburb's heritage significance. Residents were overwhelmingly in support of the Reid Conservation Area being entered in the Register of the National Estate in 1980.^v

Values which meet ACT Heritage Criteria

a. Importance in the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history

The Reid Housing Precinct is important historically, as its layout was specifically included in the Griffins' plan for Canberra. It is one of Australia's most substantial and distinctive suburban environments inspired by the Garden City movement. The first stage of the precinct is important for being constructed to meet the urgent need to provide housing for public servants relocated to Canberra prior to the opening of the provisional Parliament House in 1927.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects

The precinct demonstrates the principal characteristics of Garden City planning in Canberra in the 1920s and its public gardens and street tree planting overseen by Thomas Charles Weston, Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. The 1920s housing is more coherent and better maintained than similar dwellings built at the same time in Forrest and Kingston.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

The precinct contains some of the best public housing built in the first 50 years of the Commonwealth Government in Canberra. Its architectural character is valued for its high degree of aesthetic unity in the design of the relatively modest houses. Dignity and solidity are achieved by the use of solid plain areas of walls with windows set within them, and substantial columns and piers. There is a restraint of detail and minimal furnishings.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

The precinct is important for its associations with the Canberra community as the first area providing housing for public servants during the re-location of the Commonwealth Government to Canberra. The longevity of the Reid Residents' Association indicates the strong community feeling which survives after nearly a century and reflects the success of the early social planning ideals for the suburb.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.

The precinct has special associations with the Griffins (as the designers of Canberra and the layout of the Reid precinct), the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, which planned the precinct, and its Chairman Sir John Sulman, who was Australia's authority on town planning at the time. It also has associations with the Federal Capital Commission, which developed the precinct in the late 1920s and the Department of Interior, which supervised the design and construction of the houses in the 1930s.

ⁱ Edited version of Reid Housing Precinct entry to the ACT Heritage Register, ACT Heritage Council, https://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/148474/462.pdf

ⁱⁱ University of Canberra (1980) Reid Conservation Area Conservation Plan, pp48-59

ⁱⁱⁱ Op.cit., pp60-64

^{iv} Gray, J.E. (1985) Canberra, From Limestone Plains to Garden City. The Story of the National Capital, pp5-6

^v Reid Residents Association (2000), The Heritage of Reid, Shibu Dutta (foreword) and John Mulvaney (introduction)