

**AIA ACT CHAPTER: REGISTER OF SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURE**

Draft prepared by Eric Martin AM

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NAME OF PLACE		CANBERRA OLYMPIC POOL	
Other/Former Names		Civic Olympic Pool; Civic Pool	
Address/Location		Block 2 Section 37 Canberra City	
Listing Status	Registered	Other Heritage Listings	National Trust of Australia
Date of Listing	1984	Level of Significance	Territory
Citation	RSA R028 Revision 7	Category	Recreational
Date of Design	1953	Style	Post War International
Construction Period	1954/54	Designer/architect	Ian Slater
Date of Additions	1960-2005	Client/Owner	ACT Government
		Builder	Commonwealth Department of Works.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			
<p>The Canberra Olympic Pool is a complex of high aesthetic appeal due to its setting within a large, landscaped area of mature deciduous trees and lawn. The setting also includes trees to surrounding streets and the entrance landscaped area. It is recognised for its outstanding design by Department of Works Architect Ian Slater having won the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) (NSW Chapter) Sulman Award for buildings in NSW or the ACT in 1955 and continues to be recognised through its listing on the RAIA (ACT) Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture.</p> <p>The diving tower is an impressive and unusual cantilevered reinforced concrete structure of interesting design. The complex has a high degree of integrity as a representative Post War International Style building which retains substantial original fabric including its external colour scheme. Elements that reinforce the style are cubiform shape, plain relatively smooth wall surfaces with some contrasting textures and contrasting non rectangular vaulted shapes.</p> <p>It was constructed at a time of greater interest in swimming due to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and remains as one of the earliest community pool complexes with three pools in Australia.</p> <p>The pool has continued with a strong social community interest within Canberra with much of the population enjoying the facility for nearly 50 years.</p>			
BACKGROUND/HISTORY			
<p>The Canberra Olympic Pool complex was designed by Ian Slater of the Commonwealth Department of Works, ACT Branch in 1953/54. The pool was completed in 1955 and was officially opened on 28/1/1956 by Mr A Fairhall, the then Minister for the Interior. This was during the lead up to the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne and was associated with increased interest in swimming and diving.</p> <p>The pool was awarded the Sulman Award by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects for meritorious architecture in NSW in the recreational and sporting class for 1955. Refer photos below (Figures 5 to 10) which appeared in Architecture in Australia, following announcement of the award.</p> <p>Architecture in Australia described the pool as consisting of</p> <p><i>...three pools, the main pool of 50 metres, the children's pool, 60 ft., and a diving pool with a depth of 16ft. Each pool is a reinforced concrete tank faced with glazed tiles, with starting blocks and lanes defined by contrasting colours. A bright effect has been achieved by the use of planting boxes of shrubs and flowers on the concrete concourse and gaily coloured umbrellas on the</i></p>			



*surrounding lawns. The buildings consisting of change rooms and club rooms, filtration plant and work shop are grouped about the north to south west section of the site, with closed boarded fence links to assist in protecting the pools from the boisterous north west winds prevalent in Canberra.*

*The new pool will ultimately form part of Central Park and the environs will be landscaped to provide a park setting for five acres.<sup>2</sup>*

Major changes to the buildings over the period 1960 - 2005 have been:

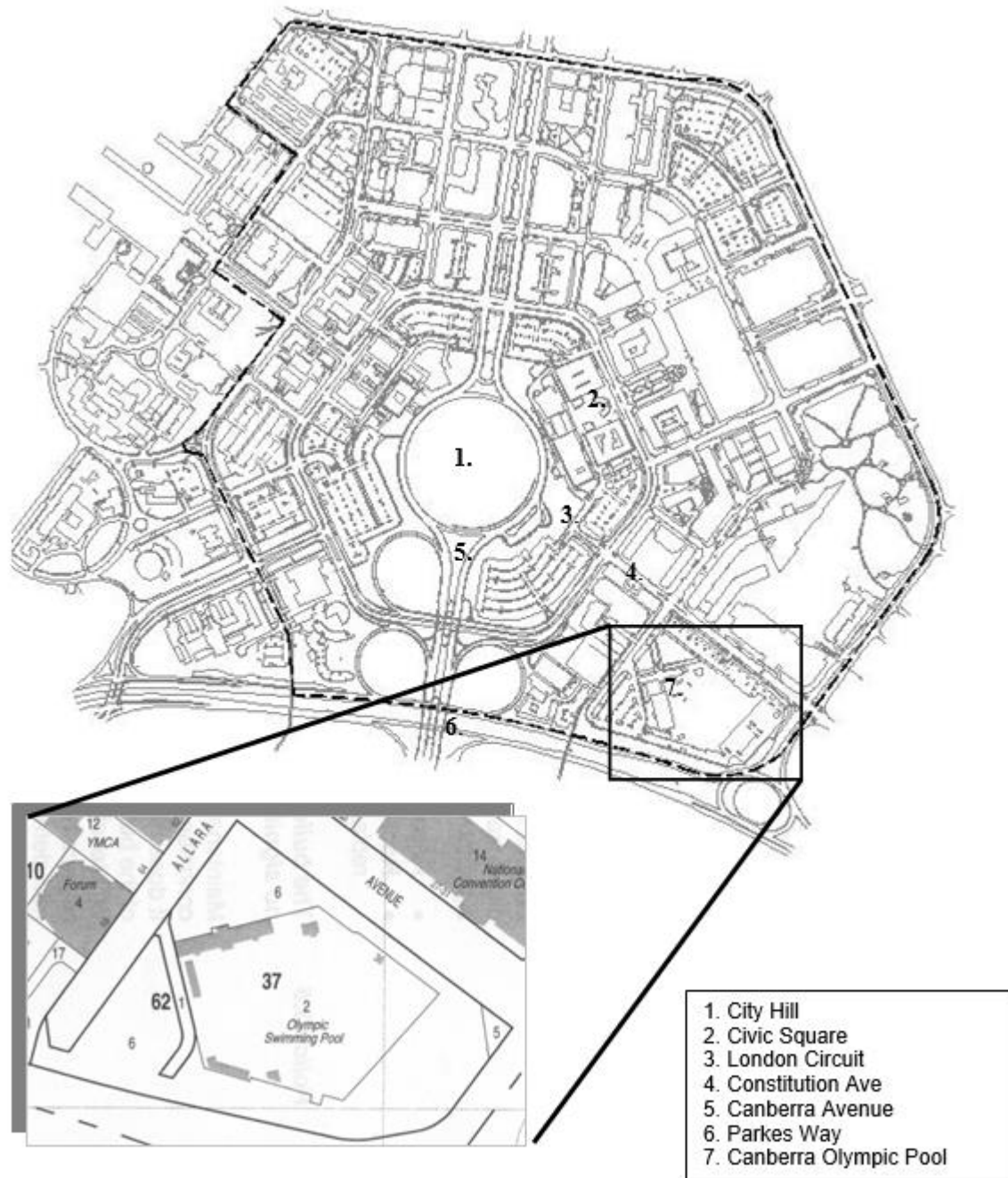
- Addition of the kiosk in the southern area behind the diving pool (c1965).
- Extension to the northern end of the club rooms on the western side of the pool which happened before 1967 (refer Figure 12).
- Minor adjustment to the length of the Olympic Pool to alter it from 55 yards to 50 metres in the 1970s.
- Replacement of cloth umbrellas with metal umbrellas in 1970s.
- New flagpoles in front of main entry c1970s.
- The covering of the Children's Pool c1995.
- The installation of the Dome over the Olympic Pool and the associated control room to the southern end of the pool, 1991.
- Conversion of the northern change rooms to other uses (currently a gym), the eastern half in 1991 and the remainder in the late 1990s.
- New lighting in the 1960s and the 1980s.
- Alteration to plant and equipment in 1991.
- Conversion of part of the western change rooms to other uses (currently the Canberra Injury Management Centre in the 1990s).
- Alterations in 1970s and enclosure of the main entry area to offices and kiosk in 1991 and in the late 1990s.
- Adaptation of the former club rooms in the 1990s (West building) for other uses (currently a first aid room, disused bathroom and Body Plus).
- Erection of 4 beach volleyball courts on the eastern edge of the landscaped area in 1999.
- Erection of a demountable building at the eastern end of the northern building c2000.
- Changes to staff car parking arrangements c2000.
- Erection of Colorbond shed on west side of bubble c2002.
- Numerous other minor additions and alterations.

#### DESIGNER/ARCHITECT

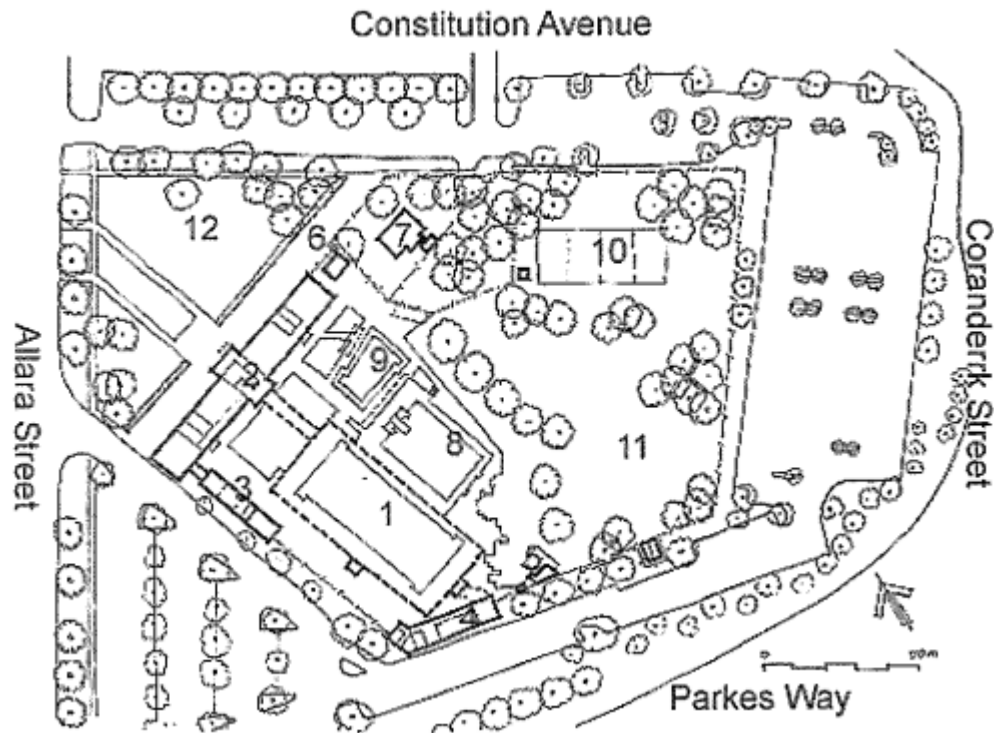
Ian Slater, Commonwealth Department of Works



## PLANS

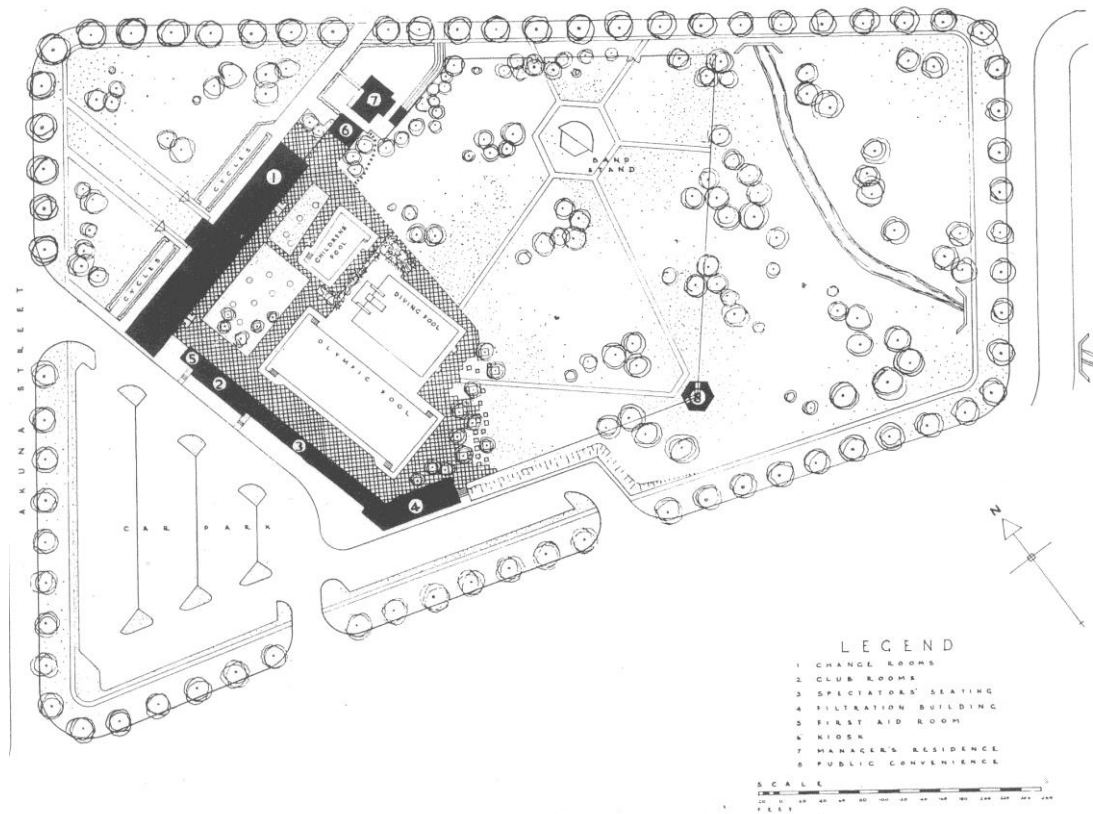
**Figure 1: Location Plan**

Source: Eric Martin & Associates, 2004

**LEGEND:**

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Main Pool              | 7. Former Manager's Residence |
| 2. Main Building          | 8. Diving Pool                |
| 3. West Building          | 9. Learner's Pool             |
| 4. Plant Room             | 10. Beach Volley Ball Courts  |
| 5. Kiosk                  | 11. Landscaped Area           |
| 6. Prefabricated Building | 12. Entrance Landscaped Area  |

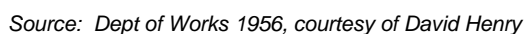
**Figure 2: Site Plan***Source: Eric Martin & Associates, 2004*



**Figure 3: Site Plan 1956**

Source: *Architecture in Australia, 1956*





## PHOTOGRAPHS

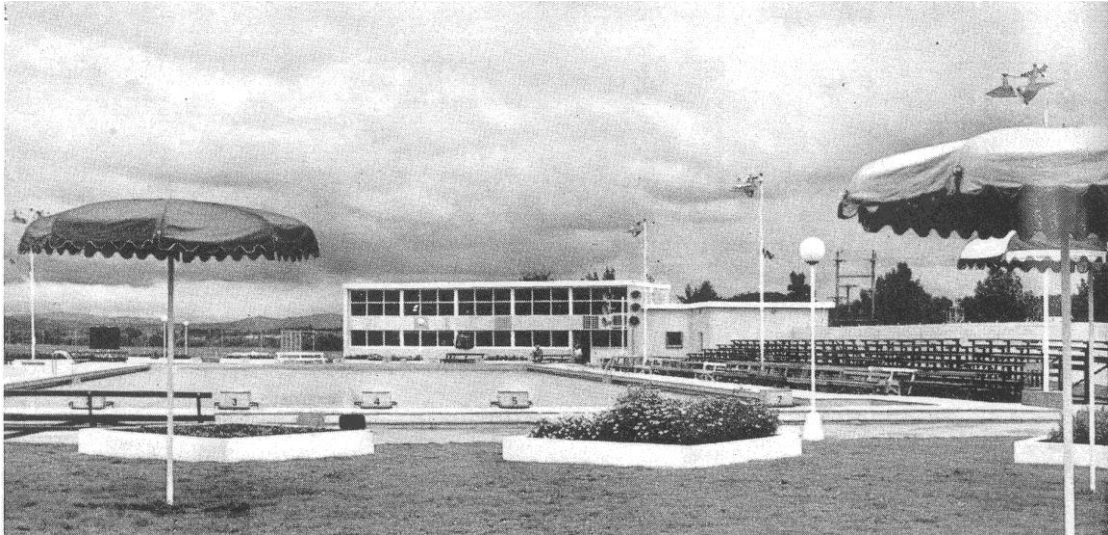
**Figure 5: Pool Entry 1956**

*Source: Architecture in Australia, 1956*

**Figure 6: Children's Pool with Diving Tower Behind 1956**

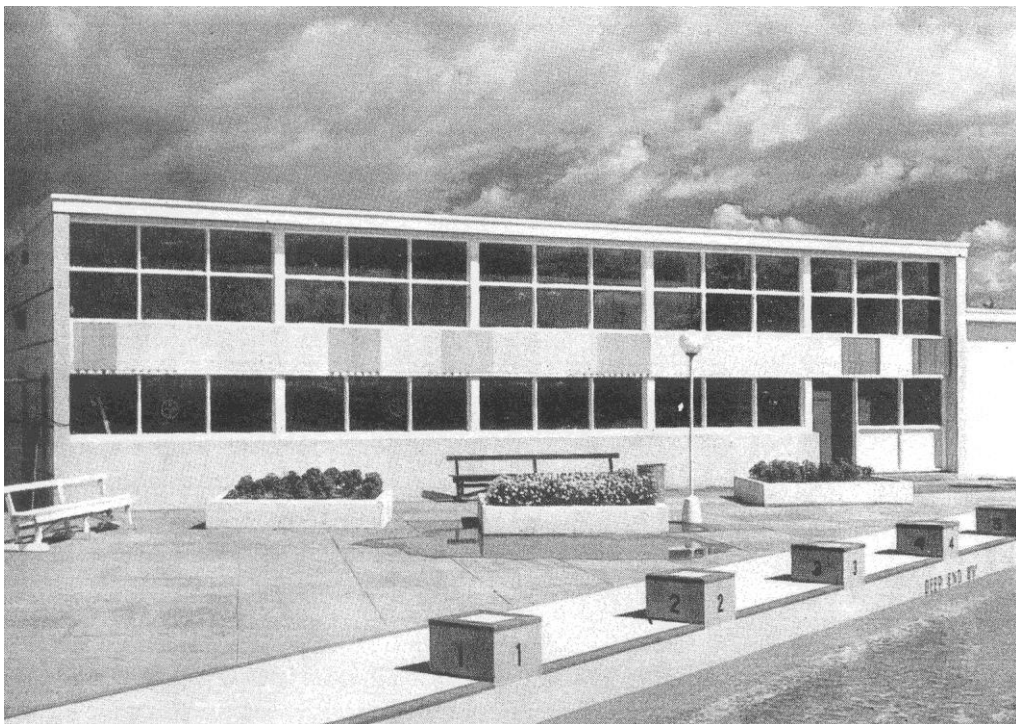
*Source: Architecture in Australia, 1956*





**Figure 7: Olympic Pool looking South 1956**

*Source: Architecture in Australia, 1956*



**Figure 8: Filtration Plant 1956**

*Source: Architecture in Australia, 1956*





**Figure 9: Overview of Pools 1956**

*Source: Architecture in Australia, 1956*

#### CONDITION

The pool is in reasonable condition and is still used but some finishes are deteriorating and there are some inherent problems with plant and leaks.

#### VALUES WHICH MEET ACT HERITAGE CRITERIA

- a. Importance to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

The pool is comparatively intact for its 1955 date and remains as one of the earliest community complexes with three pools in Australia. This extends to the maintenance of form, detail and colours.

- b. has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

The pool complex continues as a specialist venue that maintains a high patronage. The way of life that the pool complex illustrates is not one that is in danger of being lost but is one of interest

- c. potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

There are probably untold stories about the role the pool has played in community life. The history of the pool provides an interesting slice of Canberra's history which is valued by all.

- d. importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;

The pool does demonstrate the characteristics of Post War International Style but as it is a relatively modest building there are better examples of the style such as Sid Ancher's Lyneham and Dickson flats (1960), Harry Seidler's Boden House (1955) and Alex Jelinek's Benjamin House (1958).

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

The swimming pool won the RAIA NSW Chapter Sulman Award in 1955 for meritorious architecture. It is still recognised by the RAIA for its design excellence by its inclusion in the RAIA Register of Significant Architecture.

The overall attractive setting of pools within a landscape is a distinctive example of the International Style expressed in Canberra after World War Two. This extends from the trees along the surrounding streets, to the entrance landscaped area and the informal trees within extensive lawn areas around the pools.

- f. importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;

The reinforced concrete diving structure is one of a few for its time (no others currently known) and shows innovation and technical achievement.

The innovation is through its cantilever concrete structure which was quite a technical achievement for its day. The importance of the diving tower is strengthened its illustration on the front cover of *architecture in Australia* in 1956.

- g. has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

The pool is highly valued by the community as is illustrated by the strong views that it is a meeting place and the community pressure put on in the 1980s to keep it as a major community facility.

- h. has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.

The associate values of the pool are relatively minor although there are important Canberrans who have been associated with the pool including:

- James Brophy – President of the Canberra Amateur Swimming Club for 23 years and Auditor-General;
- John McGibbon – Australian backstroker;
- David Neesham – Australian water polo player; and
- A number of significant Australians as patrons.

