

Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter

Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R081

Name of Place: Corroboree Park Housing Precinct

Other/Former Names: Corroboree Park Ainslie Urban Conservation Area

Address: Paterson Street, Corroboree Park, Toms, Hargraves, Lister and Higgins Crescents, and Limestone Avenue, Ainslie ACT 2602.

Location: Section 2 Blocks 1-10, Section 3 Blocks 1-8, Section 4 Blocks 1-6, Section 5 Blocks 1-7, Section 6 Blocks 1-9, 19, 25, Sections 7 to 12, Section 13 Blocks 6-14, 17-18, Section 79 Ainslie and all and adjacent road reservations as identified as part of H25.

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	ACT Register
Date of Listing:	1990	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	February 2022	Style:	Georgian Revival
Date of Design:	c1925	Planner and Architects:	Sulman and FCC
Construction Period:	1925-1950s	Client/Owner/Lessee:	FCC, Dept of Interior and others
		Builders:	Various

Statement of Significance

Corroboree Park Housing Precinct is part of Australia's most substantial and distinctive suburban environments inspired by the Garden City movement. The precinct demonstrates the principal characteristics of Garden City planning in Canberra in the 1920s. It is also important for its associations with the Aboriginal use of the area prior to European settlement, including a reported location of a corroboree ground from which its name is derived.

The precinct has special associations with the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, which planned the precinct, its Chairman Sir John Sulman, Australia's authority on town planning, and the Federal Capital Commission, which developed the precinct. The architectural character of the precinct is valued for its high degree of aesthetic unity in the design of the cottages.

The precinct has long associations with Canberra's community life, being the location of the Ainslie Hall, Corroboree Park Youth Centre, Ainslie Tennis Club courts and pavilion, a Girl Guides Hall and Ainslie Church of Christ.

Description

Corroboree Park Housing Precinct, developed on the 1920s, is one of Canberra's early housing precincts which, with their landscaping, later housing and community facilities, represent the purest adaptation of garden city principles in Australia.¹ The road pattern around the semi-circular Corroboree Park has four symmetrical crescent-shaped streets leading to it. There are circular traffic islands and wedge-shaped reserves at difficult street intersections. The road reservations are narrow, with extensive nature strips and footpaths along hedges, intended to be low, with no front fences. Power poles and wires are carried at the backs of blocks, to allow trees in nature strips, generally of single species in each street. Advantage has been taken of the generous spaces in Corroboree Park and the reserves to grow large trees.

The timber cottages in Paterson Street are FCC 25 Types T1, 2 and 3. Some are clad fully in splayed weatherboards, others with weatherboards below sill height and fibro sheeting above. The double-hung windows have margined-glass panes, a pre-Georgian Revival style feature. Their usually hipped roofs are clad in 'Salvus' iron, crimped to resemble tiles when painted red. They are carefully arranged in pairs. Cottages with mirror-reversed off-centre verandahs are set forward each side of pairs of cottages with central verandahs.

The Types T5, and T12 to T17 cottages, designed and built from 1926 to 1927 in the four crescents and facing the park are in the Inter-War Georgian Revival style. The broad characteristics of the style are exhibited: free-standing cottages with simplified classicism in formal garden settings.² The cottages are set

well back to showcase front gardens. Car garages are set to the rear of allotments so as not to detract from the street picture. For these timber-framed cottages, alternate elevations on the same floor plan are used, with some plans being mirror reversed. Unity is achieved by the recurring use of architectural elements. The cottages have rusticated weatherboard-clad walls, terracotta-tiled hipped roofs and double-hung sash windows. The upper sashes have six panes and the lower sashes are generally single-paned. T2 and T3 plans were amended to have such features. Some cottages have decorative latticework, others arched timber or brick entry porches.

Condition

Of the 34 cottages built in Paterson Street in 1926 and of the 68 government cottages built elsewhere in the precinct in 1926-7, almost all survive, in good condition. Conservation of the precinct has been achieved, due to it being entered in the ACT Heritage Register with requirements to protect the features intrinsic to its heritage significance. In addition, the ACT Government has arranged for free heritage advice to be given by architects. Some pre-Canberra Yellow Box and Red Gum trees survive in the park and planted trees are well cared for.

Background/History

The site of Canberra's city centre was Ngunnawal aboriginal tribal land until 1824, when the Colonial Secretary sanctioned J. J. Moore's temporary occupation of 2000 acres there. In 1825 James Ainslie, while searching for pasture land to be granted to Robert Campbell, established a camp site at a clump of trees, identified as today's Corroboree Park, beyond Moore's land. Corroborees continued there in the late 19th century. Canberra was selected in 1908 as the site for the Federal Capital and Walter Burley Griffin won the 1911 competition for its design. His final plan was drawn in 1918. In the 1921-24 Federal Capital Advisory Committee's 1924 plan, the precinct was laid out under its Chairman Sir John Sulman, Australia's authority on town planning.³ An Australian Garden City environment with single-storey cottages was achieved. Large back yards were provided for tenants to grow fruit and vegetables.

In 1925 the Federal Capital Commission took over from the FCAC and, in the approved plan for Canberra, allocated an area for timber cottages around the park, to be low-cost and have affordable rents. The first line of 34 cottages, designed under Head Architect Henry Rolland, were built in 1926 along Paterson Street. They were "only available to officers having small salaries and a family as only a limited number is available"⁴. FCC architects, by 1926 under Robert Casboulte, then produced new designs for timber cottages in the Georgian Revival style. They were built throughout the precinct until 1927 and the FCC was disbanded in 1929. The Georgian Revival style had emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century. For the first time an early style of Australia's own architecture was chosen for a twentieth-century idiom, largely owing to the efforts of the architect William Hardy Wilson, who had rediscovered and recorded the Old Colonial and Regency architecture of NSW and Tasmania.⁵ The Ainslie cottages resemble some in Sydney he designed.

To relieve monotony, some blocks were put up for private purchase, resulting in houses by notable non-government architects – Burcham Clamp & Finch at 21 Higgins Crescent (1928); Kenneth Oliphant at 10 Higgins Crescent (1929, intended to be a six-bed maternity hospital but not used as such), 14&21 Lister Crescent, (1929 & 1940), 62 Limestone Ave (1940) 78 Limestone Ave.(1954) and others; Moir & Sutherland at 76 Limestone Ave (1940), 25 Toms Crescent (1940), 9 Paterson Street, (1941) and others. Brick houses were allowed along Limestone Avenue.

The park was laid out around the dense clump of trees where Ainslie had camped. The public domain landscaping of the precinct was overseen by Thomas Charles Weston who was Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. Weston's use of native species was an innovative practice for the period.⁶ In 1926 a children's playground in the park was completed and the FCC began a public omnibus service, terminating at a bus waiting shed with a public toilet in the park (both demolished). The North Ainslie Social Service Tennis Club was formed in 1927, the first two courts were constructed in the park in 1928 and by 1945 there was a third court. A clubhouse built in 1930 was replaced by the present pavilion in 1957. In the 1930s Depression, thanks to the Canberra Unemployment Relief Committee, the courts were top dressed and Club members were instrumental in having 500 trees planted in the park by the unemployed.

Most of the building which is now the Ainslie Hall in Corroboree Park was originally built at Acton as a temporary Masonic Temple for Lodge Canberra. The first meeting was held in November 1923, eight months after the lodge, Canberra's first, was formed. The building was compulsorily purchased by the Federal Capital Commission in 1926 to meet its pressing short-term demand for office space. As there was an urgent need for a school at the temporary Russell Hill settlement, near today's Campbell shops, the Commission dismantled the former Masonic Temple and rebuilt it there for use as a school, which began with 110 pupils in 1927. The hall was again dismantled and rebuilt in Corroboree Park in 1931. From 1931 to the present the hall has been regularly used for a wide variety of meetings, activities and functions. One important use of the Ainslie Hall was for Church of England services. The first service was held in 1938, conducted by the Church of England Men's Society, with a demountable altar. There was enthusiasm for the erection of a new church

hall and a foundation stone was laid at a site in Cowper Street, Ainslie in 1941. Eventually All Saints' Church Hall was built, and services were transferred there in 1953.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) became interested in providing activities for Ainslie boys, as many of them had shown much interest in competitors training in the hall for the North Canberra RSL Boxing Tournaments. In 1948 the YMCA Canberra Board "decided to approach the Department of the Interior re the question of accommodation in the Ainslie Hall." In 1949 an Ainslie Youth Centre Committee, with the YMCA represented, was being formed and a "Youth Centre Hut", designed and built adjacent to the Ainslie Hall by the Department of Works and Housing for the Canberra Services Branch, Department of the Interior as a recreational centre for the young people of the district was opened in 1950. By 1959 the YMCA reported "the development and further expansion of our work at Corroboree Park," where 23 groups were meeting each week.

The Corroboree Park Youth Centre lounge was used from 1953 as a children's library. After the name 'Canberra Public Library Service' was adopted in 1960, the library in Corroboree Park was a Children's Branch of that Service. The opening of the Dickson District Library in 1969, the first major permanent library and the focus of a fully developed library service for north-side Canberra, caused the closure of the children's library at Corroboree Park.

In September 1969, during a Blues Jazz Group concert in the Ainslie Hall, a fire in the fireplace spread to the roof around the chimney and took hold. There was considerable damage to the hall, causing the roof to cave in and the walls to lean. The Department of the Interior estimated \$20,000 was needed to rebuild the hall, and were not inclined to do so. The YMCA estimated rebuilding could be achieved for \$10,000, based on a plan by the architect Frank Hargrave, a \$8,000 quote from the builder H. J. Bradley and volunteers providing labour. The Department agreed to this proposal and met part of the cost. The hall was reopened on 12 December 1970.

By 1957 there was a basketball court and a cricket pitch in the park. In the era of the National Capital Development Commission, the park was improved, with an underground sprinkler system (1968), a car park in Paterson Street, barbecues and a table tennis table (1973). Northside Community Service has administered the two halls as Corroboree Park Community Centre since 1986. Its administrative offices were in the Youth Centre until most moved to the new Majura Community Centre at Dickson in 1990.⁷

In 1950 a Girl Guides Hall was built of weatherboard-clad timber facing Lister Crescent to a design by the Department of Works. It continues to serve its original purpose. Ainslie Church of Christ Complex in Limestone Avenue, is also in the precinct, on Blocks 6 to 9, Section 9. The buildings, by the prominent Melbourne architect Harry Norris, are all of brick – first a Manse in 1953, followed by a hall in the same year, and a church in 1959. Both have Baptistries for total immersion and are good examples of the Post-War Ecclesiastical style, with influences from Royal Festival Hall, (London, 1951).⁸ The Ainslie Church of Christ continues to the present day.

Values which meet ACT Heritage Criteria

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

The Corroboree Park Housing Precinct is important for being part 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 tradesmen involved in constructing the commercial and residential areas of the city prior to the opening of Parliament House in 1927.

d. Importance in demonstrates 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 domain landscaping overseen by Thomas Charles Weston, Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens.

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

The architectural character of the precinct is valued for its high degree of aesthetic unity in the design of the cottages. This includes the use of alternate elevations on the same floor plan, the mirror reversing of floor plans and the recurring use of architectural elements.

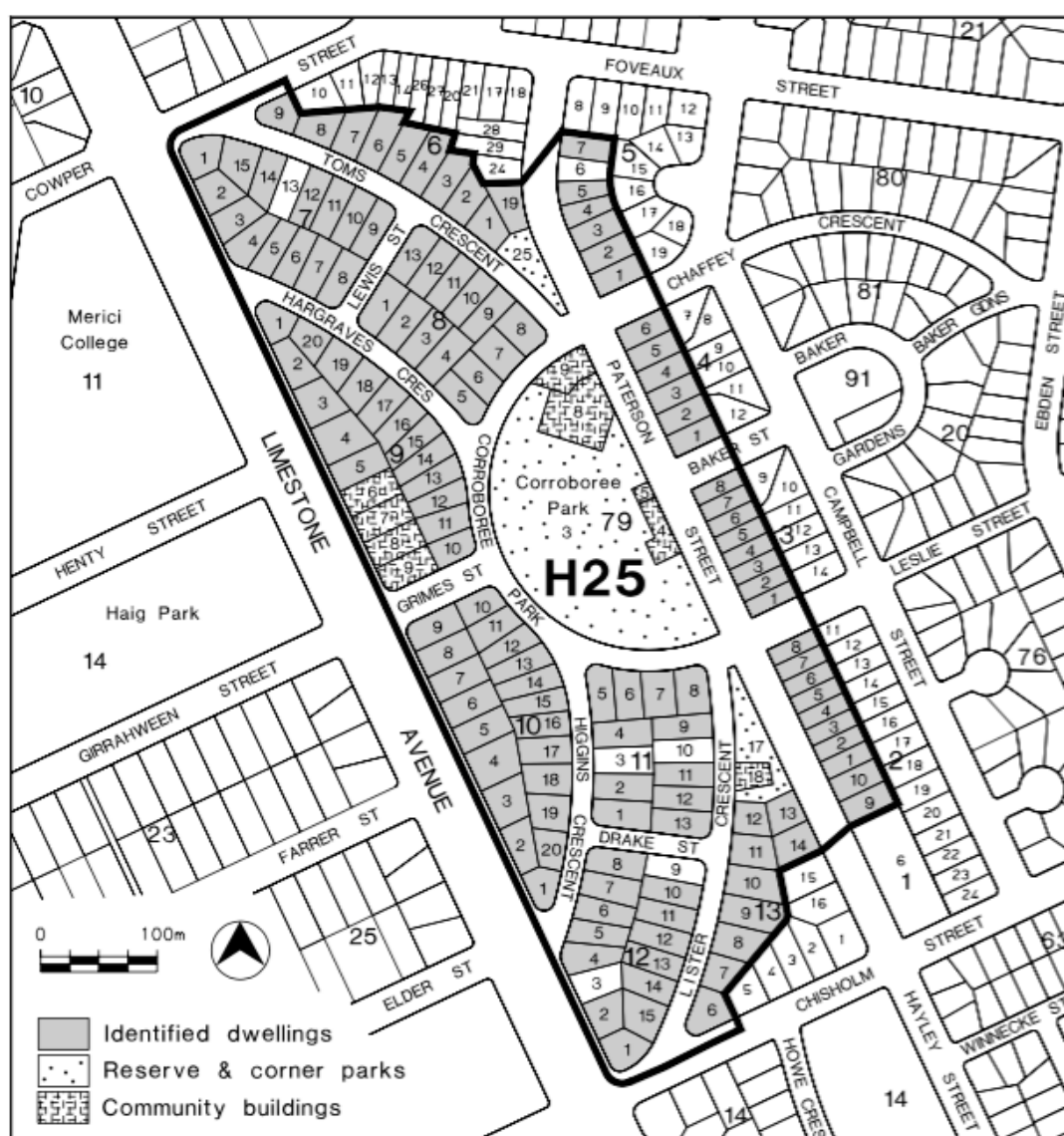
g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

The precinct is important for its associations with the Aboriginal use of the area prior to European settlement, including a reported location of a corroboree ground from which the name of the central reserve, Corroboree Park, is derived. It is also important for its long associations with the Canberra community, being the location of the Ainslie Hall, Corroboree Park Youth Centre, Ainslie Tennis Club courts and pavilion, a Girl Guides Hall and Ainslie Church of Christ.

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 Federal Capital Advisory Committee, which planned the precinct and its Chairman Sir John Sulman, who was Australia's authority on town planning. It also has associations with the Federal Capital Commission, which developed the precinct in the late 1920s.

This citation was prepared by Ken Charlton AM LFRAIA



Corroboree Park Housing Precinct.

Source: ACT Heritage Council



Cottages at 26 & 24 Paterson Street



FCC T12 Cottage, 3 Corroboree Park



FCC T17 Cottage, 14 Toms Crescent



Former Corroboree Park Youth Centre



Ainslie Hall

Photos: Ken Charlton

End Notes

¹Robert Freestone, 'Planning Suburban Canberra in the 1920s' in *The Early Canberra House Living in Canberra 1911-1933*, An anthology by Peter Freeman, Federal Capital Press, 1996

² Apperly, Irving & Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture*, A&R, 1989, p153

³ Peter Freeman Pty Ltd, *Corroboree Park Community Centre, Ainslie ACT, Conservation Management Plan*, 2002 for Northside Community Service, p5

⁴ Federal Capital Commission, *General Notes for the Information of Public Servants*, 1926, National Trust of Australia & Canberra Times, 1996 Facsimile

⁵ Apperly, Irving & Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture*, A&R, 1989, p150

⁶ ACT Heritage Council, Corroboree Park Housing Precinct Entry in the ACT Heritage Register, Statement of Significance.

⁷ Peter Freeman Pty Ltd, pages 5 to 26

⁸ James Pritchard, *The Heritage of the Ainslie Church of Christ Complex*, U of C Conservation Study for the Cultural Heritage Management Course, 2000.