

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R023

Name of Place: Mount Stromlo Administration Building

Other/Former Names: Commonwealth Solar Observatory

Address/Location: Mount Stromlo Road ACT
Block 38 Section of Mt Stromlo

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:	1984	Level of Significance:	National
Citation Revision No:	1	Category:	Scientific
Citation Revision Date:	September 1989	Style:	Garden Pavilion Style

Date of Design:	1924?	Designer:	JS Murdoch assisted initially by Rolland and later by Casboulte for Federal Capital Commission
Construction Period:	1925-26	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Australian National University
Date of Additions:	1926	Builder:	

Statement of Significance

A significant observatory both historically and scientifically, conceived in 1905 by pioneer solar astronomer Dr W G Duffield to fill a gap in the western Pacific. The observatory administration complex was designed by significant Federal Capital architect J S Murdoch, assisted initially by H M Rolland and later by J S Casboulte. The complex is one of a unified collection of buildings in a remote hilltop landscape setting appropriate to its function. The original administration building and other buildings form one of the finest examples of the garden pavilion style in the Federal Capital. The building exhibits differing influences in the design of architectural elements, and is a good example of Federal Capital architecture.

Description

The administration building complex consists of the original 1925 administration building, extended and linked in 1926 by garden walls to the east and west wings, containing telescope domes, laboratories, library and workshops. The central administration building, and the two wings form a symmetrical complex of hipped tile-roofed, brick pavilions with rough-cast walls and Georgian fenestration, surrounding garden courts, with two symmetrically planned domes - the sun telescope to the east and the Farnham refractor telescope to the west. The solar laboratory was the east wing, with the laboratory in its basement, and a covered tunnel for a large spectrograph. At ground level there is a library and lecture room. The sun-telescope beam was once contained in a vertical column through the library. The architectural elements in the building add interest. The arched doors and windows are stripped Classical in style, while the curved and moulded outlines of the garden walls, with slit openings add a Spanish Mission character to the complex. The octagonal towers of the telescope domes exhibit Art Deco styling, with stepped modeling of the parapets and surfaces of the towers, and a frieze around each tower alluding to the sun with the use of roundels.

These roundels are repeated on the rainwater heads. The entrance porch in the original central administration building was sympathetically enclosed about 1930 and three arched doorways were inserted.

Condition and Integrity

Good, recently restored externally.

Background/History

Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991

(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 or 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 person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history

(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

References

Other Information Sources