

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R083

Name of Place: Barton Court

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 14 Darling Street and 11 Bourke Street, Barton
Bock 1 Section 23 of Barton

Listing Status:	Other Heritage Listings:	None
Date of Listing:	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	Style:	Inter-War Old English

Date of Design: 1933

Designer: Kenneth H. Oliphant

Construction Period: 1934-35

Client/Owner/Lessee: Barton Flats Limited

Date of Additions: 1962, 1981

Builder: C. R. Sweetnam

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Barton Court displays visual imagery derived from traditional English rural and village architecture in a domestic scaled, free-standing pair of buildings. As such it is a notable example of the Inter-War Old English style of architecture which was seen in Australia for a brief period in the early 1930s. Most characteristics of the style: imitation half-timbering, gables, tall chimneys, casements windows, some leadlight glazing and finely-crafted brickwork and joinery are features of the buildings. It was Canberra's first privately built residential flats development.

Barton Court demonstrates a fine level of application of traditional building techniques in the brickwork, joinery and plasterwork which was undertaken in the construction of the building. The architect, Kenneth Oliphant, was one of the first to practise in Canberra and designed many buildings in various styles between 1927 and the late 1960s which added to the architectural character of the city.

DESCRIPTION

Barton Court comprises 16 residential flats in two two-storey buildings, between Darling and Bourke Streets, Barton, completed in 1935. The site has north and south street frontages and an eastern boundary along Macquarie Street. Building 1, 14 Darling Street, faces north and Building 2, 11 Bourke Street, faces south. Within the site, facing Macquarie Street, is a separate three-storey building of 21 units completed in 1981 between the original buildings. That building and the three blocks of carports in the yard behind the flats are not part of the listing in this register.

The two buildings, each of 8 flats, are mirror-images of each other. In Building 2 the outer ground-floor flats 1 and 6 are mirror images, as are the inner ground-floor flats 2 and 5 but the plan of each pair is slightly different. The first-floor flats repeat the plans of the flats below. Each flat has an entrance hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, lobby, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The only variations to the symmetry of the plans are the positions of the fireplaces. To achieve a prominent picturesque asymmetrical chimney with stepped sides, Oliphant placed the living room fireplace of flat 5 on the front wall and placed that of flat 7 above it. All other fireplaces are on internal walls of living rooms. Between each pair of ground floor flats is a central entrance into a stair hall from which they and the first floor flats are entered. Flats 2 and 5 each have a porch

beside the entrance. Each first floor flat has a recessed front balcony. The rear entrance to each flat is via a tiny porch, with a “tradesmen’s cupboard”, a “boot cupboard” and a door opening into the kitchen.

The flats are constructed of brick walls, some rendered externally and some of face brickwork. A high standard of traditional craftsmanship is evident in the brickwork, joinery and plasterwork. In each of the front facades the gabled central pavilion has imitation half-timbering in the slightly jettied upper floor and the gable. Other slightly-jettied upper floors with imitation half-timbering are between that and the end pavilions and in the centres of the rear facades. The windows are mainly wooden casements with small panes, but some glazing at the entrances is in lead comes. The ground floors are of timber construction and the upper floors are of reinforced concrete. The hipped and gabled roofs are clad in red terracotta tiles and pitched at 40 degrees, except for the gables of the front pavilions, which are pitched at 47 1/2 degrees. The rear stairs are of reinforced concrete.ⁱ

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

On 22 May 1933 the Department of the Interior received an application by the architect Kenneth Oliphant, on behalf of a private syndicate, for the lease of block 1, section 23, Barton on which to erect “first-class self-contained flats”. The intention was “to erect a block of flats at either end of the section...each to contain 8 flats.” The value of the site was assessed at £1500.ⁱⁱ There was at the time a “housing famine” in Canberra, and *The Canberra Times* reported that a “partial solution of the housing problem...will be reached if negotiations between the Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) and a private builder for the construction of a block of flats reach a satisfactory conclusion. Mr Perkins said...he was impressed with the scheme...”ⁱⁱⁱ Oliphant advised the Department in June that plans and specifications were being prepared and the working drawings were completed in August 1933. The building application was received on 17 October. On 5 December Oliphant proposed that a third block of flats might be erected along the Macquarie Street frontage. The Secretary of the Department, C.S. Daly, raised no objection to the proposal, but “care should be taken at the time that nothing be done which would spoil the amenity of the scheme as originally conceived.” The lease was granted on 21 December 1933 for the erection of three buildings containing flats. A permit to erect the 16 flats was issued to the builder, C.R. Sweetnam on 9 January 1934 and the date for completion was later extended to July 1935.^{iv} It was Canberra’s first privately built residential flats development. The architect Kenneth Oliphant moved into one of the flats soon after marrying Betty Farquhar later that year and they lived there until he built a home of their own in 1938.^v

A building was erected in the yard between the blocks of flats in 1951, containing a two-bedroom caretaker’s flat and 7 garages, in 1951, but has been demolished. The original timber stairs providing access to the rear entrances to the first floor flats were replaced in 1962 by concrete stairs. The property was put up for sale in 1970 and John D. Morgan was the successful bidder at an auction on 15 January 1971. His company, Scorpio Holdings P/L became the leaseholder one month later. In February 1973 the National Capital Development Commission approved in principle a proposal to erect a further 41 one-bedroom flats on the site, but refused plans submitted in September 1973 proposing to add another storey to the existing buildings. That proposal was the subject of an application in December 1973 to the ACT Design and Siting Review Committee, which was refused because “the committee is of the opinion that the proposed roof alterations would be detrimental to the architectural quality and character of the existing buildings and would adversely affect the amenity of the locality.” An application for the construction of a 3-storey building facing Macquarie Street comprising 21 residential units, designed by Gary Willemsen for Mr and Mrs J. D. Morgan, gained NDC design and siting approval in September 1979 and was completed in July 1981. An application for all the flats and units on the site to have separate unit titles was approved in August 1980 and came into effect one month later.^{vi}

Inter-War Old English style architecture in Australia

After World War I the Queen Anne and Old English architectural styles popularised by Richard Norman Shaw in late nineteenth-century Britain became the basis for house designs by speculative builders in suburbia. These styles often moved up-market to provide instant respectability for the *nouveaux riches*. Australia, still with nostalgic ties with the mother country, responded readily to this influence, especially in the early 1930s.

The buildings in the Australian Inter-War Old English style c.1915–c.1940 were usually free-standing and domestic-scaled. All of the visually prominent attributes of traditional English rural and village architecture were exploited. Usually, picturesque ‘quaintness’ was expressed in high-quality materials and finishes. The key indicators of the style are imitation half-timbering, gables, tall chimneys, casement windows, leadlight glazing and asymmetrical massing.^{vii}

Although Barton Court lacks asymmetrical massing, an indicator which is usually characteristic of the style, it has all the other key indicators, although few of the windows have leadlight glazing. It can be compared with St Gabriel's Church of England Girls Grammar School (now Canberra Girls' Grammar School) in Deakin, designed by Rudd and Limburg and built in 1927-8, which was the first building in the Inter-War Old English style in Canberra. It resembles Barton Court in having a symmetrical two-storey front facade with a gabled central pavilion, but almost the whole of the first floor has half-timbering and the ground floor is face brickwork.

Kenneth Oliphant

Kenneth Oliphant (1894-1975) was one of Canberra's first independent practising architects. He was posted to Canberra in 1926 from Melbourne as the supervising architect for the Blandfordia 4 Housing project, now Forrest Conservation Area, which the Melbourne firm of Oakley & Parkes had won in a 1924 competition. Oliphant remained in Canberra and established his own practice in 1927. From then until the late 1960s he undertook literally hundreds of private commissions including houses and commercial developments in Civic, Braddon, Manuka and Kingston, farm buildings, church halls, industrial and institutional buildings. As with many of his contemporaries, Oliphant designed buildings in various styles, depending on the purpose of the building, fashion trends of the day and the wishes of his clients. Before designing Barton Court, he had designed houses in the Arts and Crafts, Georgian Revival and Spanish Mission styles, and progressed to the Functionalist style in some of his later work.

ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA PURSUANT TO S.10 OF THE HERITAGE ACT 2004,:

(a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;

Barton Court demonstrates a fine level of application of traditional building techniques in the brickwork, joinery and plasterwork which was undertaken in the construction of the buildings.

(g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind

Barton Court is a notable example of the Inter-War Old English style of architecture which was seen in Australia for a brief period in the early 1930s. Most characteristics of the style: imitation half-timbering, gables, tall chimneys, casements windows, some leadlight glazing and finely-crafted brickwork and joinery are features of the buildings.

(h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history

This place has associations with its architect, Kenneth Oliphant, who was one of the first to practise in Canberra and designed many buildings in various styles between 1927 and the late 1960s which added to the architectural character of the city. Barton Court was Canberra's first privately built residential flats development.

REFERENCES

ⁱ Working drawings in the ACTPLA building file.

ⁱⁱ ACTPLA Lease file.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Canberra Times*, 24 May, 1933.

^{iv} ACTPLA files.

^v Frank Longhurst, "A 40-year career shaped the old south Canberra" in *The Canberra Times*, 4 Dec 1983.

^{vi} ACTPLA files.

^{vii} Apperly, Richard, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, 1989 *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde. p 204
