

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R121

Name of Place: House at 4 Hotham Crescent, Deakin

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 4 Hotham Crescent DEAKIN ACT 2600

Block 10 Section 6 of

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| Listing Status: | Registered | Other Heritage Listings: |
| Date of Listing: | November 2004 | Level of Significance: |
| Citation Revision No: | | Category: |
| Citation Revision Date: | | Style: |

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|----------------------|----------------------|
| Date of Design: | Designer: |
| Construction Period: | Client/Owner/Lessee: |
| Date of Additions: | Builder: |

Statement of Significance

The residence at 4 Hotham Crescent, Deakin, is an example of significant architecture and an educational resource. The original house was built when the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) was relatively new in Australia. The design incorporated many of the principal design features that are specific to the style with its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape and roof concealed by parapet.

The following design features are of additional significance: the front concrete balcony roof or hood, the corner windows, the white painted rendered finish, the total dining room and lounge room fireplaces, fenestration and the original finishes.

The residence is important for its association with the talented Canberra architect Kenneth Oliphant; it is one of two surviving examples of his work still exhibiting the features specific to the style, the other is 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, and it is notable for displaying the design skill of Oliphant. Oliphant played a significant role in Canberra's cultural history. He was one of Canberra's first independent practicing architects, and may have been the first establishing his own practice in Canberra in 1927, retiring in 1960. Between 1927 and 1953 he undertook literally hundreds of private commissions including houses in the inner south of Canberra and in the village of Hall; commercial developments in Civic, Braddon, Manuka and Kingston; farm buildings; church halls; industrial and institutional buildings.

Of all his architecture the most significant is the architecture he designed just before WWII. With the passage of time many of these buildings have been demolished or extensively altered to beyond recognition of their original aesthetic, however, a few remain including the original section of the Canberra Milk Building, Griffith, 1937, and the front section of the house at 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, 1940. This gives greater significance to the residence at 4 Hotham Crescent, Deakin.

The architecture of this residence may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Inter-War Functionalist styles by locating the building in its historical and environmental contexts and placing it within the knowledge domain of architectural, urban and environmental histories.

Description

The original three bedroom residence was designed by Kenneth Oliphant for Mr J W Prowse in 1938 and construction was completed in 1939¹. The building, although extended, is an early

example of the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) with its asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape and roof concealed by parapet 2.

The residence is located centrally on the deep block, elevated from the street, and is approached across the front of the block from the curved driveway up a few steps. The house faces northwest with a glazed in entry porch with a reinforced concrete flat roof hood. This original entry porch was unglazed with the steel pipe supports extending above a low level "Colortex" brick curved porch wall.

The original recessed front entry was set slightly off centre and opens into an entry lobby with the lounge room to the left and a study to the right (originally the main bedroom). The lobby leads to the perpendicular hall that extends to the right to a bedroom and enclosed sleep-out and to the left to the kitchen and Family room. The bathroom is located at the end of the lobby. The original kitchen has been demolished and the new kitchen has been located where the third bedroom was. The family room has been located where the kitchen was and opens through to the new kitchen.

The lounge room extends out towards the front of the house and has timber framed windows to both corners, one corner now opening onto the enclosed entry porch. A central fireplace is set into the opposite wall and the door leading from the lobby is located opposite the double sliding doors to the dining room providing a flow through affect to the formal spaces. The dining room has its own fireplace to the southeast wall and a window to the front elevation slightly off-set. The original dining room window was located in the corner mirroring the Study window.

In the original house the kitchen external door opened onto a small covered porch with the external laundry to the right and a covered passage that lead to the front and rear gardens down a few steps. A single garage ran along side the passage set back from the front of the house and protruding back beyond the rear.

The house was extended in an 'L' shape along the southeast side of the house enclosing the garage and laundry. The newer wing extends from the front wall of the dining room to well beyond the rear of the house. Various bedrooms and wet areas have been located in this wing.

In a more recent extension the family room has been extended to the rear enclosing the inner corner of the "L" plan.

Externally the cavity brickwork is painted and rendered and the original windows were painted timber framed. The residence and garage have corrugated galvanized steel sheet roofing with the gutters concealed behind the parapets.

The other architectural element of the Inter-War Functionalist style displayed by the building that relates to the external form is:

- corner windows.

The internal elements of significance are the fireplaces and the remaining original finishes and fixtures.

The residence was built by Harold Hastings Reeve.

The building has been altered but is relatively well maintained and is in reasonably good condition.

Condition and Integrity

Background/History

This 1939 modern architecture was a new achievement at the time in Australia. The residence was one of the first truly modern designs in Canberra expressing the three dimensional cubic massing of the Inter-War Functionalist Style.

This modern brick architecture may have been influenced by Australian architecture of the time or

published work from Europe. In Australia this may have included work in Victoria by Geoffrey Mewton and Roy Grounds Architects in projects such as the Critchley Parker House, Upper Beaconsfield, 1933, published in the "Australian Home Beautiful" and the George Stooke House, Brighton, 1934 6.

It is likely that these influences may have also come from either Europe directly or second hand from England where the modern movement was beginning to have some affect on English architecture in the early 1930s. In Europe, influences may have been the architecture of Oud and his housing schemes and Reitveld in Holland; and Le Corbusier's work in France, as well as other modernists in Germany. This architecture was of white painted render aesthetic later referred to as the 'functionalist style' 7.

The introduction of modern (functionalist) architecture from Europe came relatively late to Australia. While it began in the 1920s in Europe it was not introduced into Australia until the mid 1930s. The period of 1915-1940 is a convenience of chronology, which could lead to a misunderstanding of the significance of a building designed in this style in 1940. The authors of "Identifying Australian Architecture" used the start of WWI to the start of WWII as an easily recognised period in history, not because this style of architecture began in Australia in 1915.

There are other examples of the Inter-War Functionalist Style in Canberra including Malcolm Moir's own house at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, 1937, by Moir, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland, the original section of the Canberra Milk Building, Griffith, designed by Ken Oliphant in about 1938, the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E H Henderson, 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, 1940, by Oliphant (now rendered and extended), the Government single storey detached houses designed by Cuthbert Whitley in Kingston and Braddon, **1940-41** and the Kingston Bus Depot Office 1940.

It is interesting to note that Oliphant's modernist architecture after this house, was of face brickwork rather than painted render, possibly in response to the major influence in Australian architecture of the Town Hall, Hilversum, Holland, 1930, by Willem Dudok.

The original 1939 residence comprised a covered entry porch and entrance lobby. The lobby opened into the lounge room and main bedroom. The dining room opened off the lounge room and kitchen. There were two bedrooms to the rear with the bathroom located between them. A sleep out opened of the two northwest bedrooms. Access to the side garage was via a covered passage. The massing was cubic in form with the sleepout parapet set at a slightly lower level on the western façade and the garage parapet set well down on the eastern façade. The entry concrete hood was set well down from the adjoining parapet and with its curved corners and lower curved brick corners of the porch wall they provided a contrasting curved form to the cubic overall massing. The brickwork set below floor level was left as an unpainted face brick base.

The Embassy of Indonesia occupied the residence from 1952 to 1971 and in 1956 added the eastern wing, designed by Mussen & Scollay Architects. In 1960 a room was added to the side of the dining room and in front of the garage. This had the detrimental result of removing one of the corner windows and closing in the expressed chimney, significant elements of the original design. In the late 1960s two rooms were added to the rear of the eastern wing, designed by Theo Bischoff, Architect. By the time the embassy was sold the whole of the interior was used as offices. The house was then owned by Mr & Mrs R A Schall and they made internal alterations to return the place to residential use. The enclosure of the entry porch is shown as existing on a plan dated 1971 and so the glazing may have been installed in the 1960s.

Kenneth Oliphant (1894-1975) was one of Canberra's first independent practicing architects, and may have been the first. 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, retiring in 1960. Between 1927 and 1953 he undertook literally hundreds of private commissions including houses in the inner south of Canberra and in the village of Hall; commercial developments in Civic, Braddon, Manuka and Kingston; farm buildings; church halls; industrial and institutional buildings.

Of all his architecture the most significant is the architecture he designed just before WWII including the original section of the Canberra Milk Building, Griffith, 1937, and the house at 24

Arthur Circle, 1940. His other functionalist designs of this period have either been demolished or extensively altered to beyond recognition of their original aesthetic, an example being the house at 13 Evans Crescent which has a Cape Cod upper level addition.

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

The creativity of the architect Kenneth Oliphant is apparent in the design of the original house, which was innovative when compared with other housing built in Canberra at that time.

The design of the house in 1938 in the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) represented a new architectural style in Australia at the time. The earliest notable Australian examples built in the style date from the mid 1930's including Critchley Parker House, Upper Beaconsfield, 1933 and the George Stooke House, Brighton, 1934 both by G Mewton and R Grounds Architects, the Sanitarium Health Food Factory, Warburton Victoria, 1937, by E Billson and the Automotive Engineering Building, Sydney Technical College, Ultimo, NSW, 1938, by E Rembert.

The earliest notable Canberra examples built in the Inter-War Functionalist Style in Canberra including Malcolm Moir's own house at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, 1937, by Moir, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland, the original section of the Canberra Milk Building, Griffith, designed by Ken Oliphant in about 1938, the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E H Henderson, 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, 1939, by Oliphant (recently rendered and extended), the Government single storey detached houses designed by Cuthbert Whitley in Kingston and Braddon, **1940-41**, and the Kingston Bus Depot Offices 1940.

The residence is most likely Oliphant's first constructed in the new Inter-War Functionalist style, and one of only two known to still exist in a recognizable form, the other being at 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest.

(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group

The residence is a significant example of the Inter-War Functionalist style of architecture and is notable for displaying the high design skill of the architect Kenneth Oliphant.

The residence exhibits many of the particular architectural elements specific to the Inter-War Functionalist Style (1915-1940) including asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shape and roof concealed by parapet.

The following design features are of additional significance: the front concrete balcony roof or hood, the corner windows, the white painted rendered finish, the total dining room and lounge room fireplaces, and the original finishes.

The building is a very good example of this style of architecture and it makes a valuable contribution to the small number of surviving Inter-War Functionalist buildings in Canberra. It compares favourably with the architecture of Moir and Sutherland and the government architecture of Cuthbert Whitley.

(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

The design of the house demonstrates an important development in architectural style between the Depression and the WWII, by contrast with traditional architectural styles. Relatively few houses were built in this style in Canberra, and only a small number of these still exist in a recognizable form. Modern architecture, both the functionalist and international periods, was the most important architecture of the 20th Century. Canberra is one of the few 20th Century designed cities in the world. The combination of modern architecture and urban design 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

Through its architectural style this building is a valuable educational resource for designers. Its architecture is characteristic of the Inter-War Functionalist style.

The architecture of this residence may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of Late Twentieth-Century Architectural styles by locating the building in its historical and environmental contexts and placing it within the knowledge domain of architectural and environmental histories. This building is a very good example of the style. Its innovative planning contributes to its significance and educational heritage. .

The modern aesthetic of the residence can be contrasted with much of the more conservative residential architecture of the time.

The residence can be compared with Malcolm Moir's own house at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest, 1937, by Moir, the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir & Sutherland, the original section of the Canberra Milk Building, Griffith, designed by Ken Oliphant in about 1938, the former Forrest Fire Station Precinct, Forrest, 1938, by E H Henderson, the house at 24 Arthur Circle, Forrest, 1940, by Oliphant (now rendered and extended), the Government single storey detached houses designed by Cuthbert Whitley in Kingston and Braddon, **1940-41**, and the Kingston Bus Depot Offices 1940.

Given that Canberra is one of the world's significant 20th century designed cities, its built form, and the timing of local events (in juxtaposition with world events and stylistic movements) is likely to be of increasing research benefit over time.

References

1. PALM Building File
2. Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds. Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present. Angus & Robertson 1989.
3. RSTCA Records
4. Richard Apperly Robert Irving Peter Reynolds opcit
5. PALM opcit.
6. Donald Leslie Johnson. Australian Architecture 1901-1951 Sources of Modernism. Sydney University Press 1980.
7. Alison & Peter Smithson. The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture. Thames & Hudson Ltd, London 1981.
8. PALM opcit.
9. Ibid and Conversation with the present owner Mr T Dalton.

Other Information Sources