

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R132

Name of Place: FLYNN PRIMARY SCHOOL (FORMER) AND FLYNN PRE-SCHOOL

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 21 Bingle Street and 51 Hedland Circuit, FLYNN
Block 7 Section 18 of Flynn

Listing Status:		Other Heritage Listings:	None
Date of Listing:		Level of Significance:	Local
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Educational
Citation Revision Date:	7/2/12	Style:	

Date of Design: 1971-72 Designer: Enrico Taglietti

Construction Period: 1972-73 Client/Owner/Lessee: NCDC/ACT Government

Date of Additions: 1975, 1995 Builder:

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The precinct comprising the former Flynn Primary School and the Flynn Pre-School is valued for its architectural significance, in particular for the aesthetic quality of the exteriors of the buildings. The more dramatic and spectacular aspects of the idiosyncratic designs of Enrico Taglietti are exhibited here to good effect. The large scale of the roof planes combine with the sculptural forms of the walls to give the school buildings aesthetic value as effective elements in an urban setting. The aesthetic quality of the buildings can also be appreciated on closer inspection. The abstract patterns created by the profiles of the walls and the way they project out to embrace courtyards produce a striking visual effect.

The roofs appear to hover over the walls and over each other. The fenestration adds to the aesthetic effect, by following the geometric pattern of the sloping walls. The sculptural qualities of the school's architecture are best appreciated in the spaces between pavilions where the sloping walls and overhanging roofs surround the observer. The community artwork at the former primary school contributes to its aesthetic value, and the large trees in the former school and pre-school grounds enhance the setting of the buildings.

The former primary school has special associations with the interesting new approach to school design which was introduced into Canberra in 1971, based on the open-plan principle for learning. This, one of the city's first primary schools specially designed to provide a flexibility of space not available in the traditional school, was successfully planned as a transition between earlier schools designed as collections of classrooms, and schools accommodating whole primary departments in single large areas.

The complex at Flynn is also valuable for its associations with the architect Enrico Taglietti, who played a significant part in the history of architecture in Canberra. Associations also developed between the primary school and John Flynn, an Australian icon, who founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service, culminating in the National Memorial to John Flynn being opened at the front of the school.

DESCRIPTION

Flynn is a northern residential suburb of Belconnen developed in the early 1970s with only two community facilities, its primary school and the pre-school.

Flynn Primary School was planned in general as six pavilions, five of which are linked by a corridor. The slope of the site to the south away from Bingle Street was used to advantage. The site has a wide,

impressive view, with scattered trees in the foreground, a thicker belt of trees in the middle distance and a backdrop of the distant Brindabella Mountains. The architect's original model showed four learning unit pavilions linked in an east-west row, a central pavilion behind, and lower than, the administration suite and two lower-level learning unit pavilions behind the linking corridor. A health centre was located in front of the corridor between the two eastern pavilions.

The first stage of the school building omitted the two furthest east and west pavilions, but otherwise followed the design of the model. The 'Blue' primary learning unit is to the west of the entrance and the 'Yellow', for infants, is to the east. A fifth, the 'Green' primary learning unit pavilion, was built in the second stage of the building, behind the eastern 'Pink' lower pavilion, for primary children, linked to it by a roof, but not conforming to the model.

The entrance is slightly off-centre, but the general effect is of symmetry. The entrance has a pyramidal skylight tower over a foyer, between administration offices. The foyer opens into the long east-west corridor, then south down stairs and along a passage through a lobby, with walls covered in murals, to the Communal Activities Room. This approach gave people a satisfactory sense of anticipation when an event was held in that room, which has a stage and access to the adjacent canteen and physical education store. The rooms each side of the passage formed the 'heart' of the school – the former library, the staff common room, a craft room, toilets and the plant room. The former Health Centre is at the eastern end of the corridor, with its own courtyard, and had a waiting room, two medical rooms, a mothercraft room and a dental room.

The four learning unit pavilions built in the first stage had similar arrangements – a large space, with a high ceiling, for cooperative team teaching, a practical work area, a withdrawal room with stepped floor, a small staff room and a corner walled courtyard. As such the school is regarded as semi open-plan. The eastern pavilion was destroyed in 1994 by fire and was replaced in 1996 by a Resource Centre, with a reading room and a computer room. At the same time the original library was converted into the 'Red' learning unit for infants from the pavilion lost in the fire. The second-stage 'Green' learning unit also has a large space with a high ceiling, but a more complex plan than the others and two internal platforms up wide steps. The pavilion also houses a craft room entered only from outside, with steps up to cooking and needlework spaces. There is a demountable classroom building located close to the communal activities room and the Resource Centre. This fibro-sheeted building has no aesthetic merit and detracts from the architectural heritage value of the school.

Flynn Pre-School has spaces for noisy and quiet learning activities, rest, toilets, staff and storage, with wings projecting to the west and south and walled corner courtyards. Walls of floor to ceiling glazing face a fenced amphitheatre-like landscaped garden play area to the north. They give the pre-school a different architectural character to that of the primary school, with no such glazed walls. Two tower-like structures rise above activity spaces to give the interior a variety of volumes. They have flat roofs with fascias matching the main roof, but as their eaves are narrow, the modestly-sized pre-school lacks the dramatic effect achieved by the soaring roofs of the primary school.

The walls of the former school and pre-school are constructed of painted off-form poured concrete with a consistent elegant profile sloping out from the door-head transom lines but cut back level near the floor lines. The walls continue around walled courtyards at balustrade-height but are full-height at the corners. Above transom level are highlight windows, enabling the roofs to appear to hover over the buildings. The other fenestration either follows the geometric pattern of the sloping walls, or is arranged as a row of rectangular slots. The abstract patterns created by the profiles of the walls and the way they project out to embrace courtyards produce a striking effect. The sculptural qualities of the school's architecture is remarkable, particularly in the play spaces between pavilions, where the sloping walls and overhanging roofs surround observers.

The walls of the second-stage 'Green' learning unit pavilion have substantial painted off-form poured concrete corner structures with profiles matching the earlier walls of the school, but they are linked by less-costly flush walls of painted cement brickwork. The fenestration has sloping reveals on the north and west sides of the pavilion, near the neighbouring pavilion, but the other window openings are rectangular. The walls of the Resource Centre are similarly constructed, but the cement-brick walls have not been painted and there are only rectangular windows openings. Its southeast concrete corner structure has an elegant corner window.

Interiors of the former school and pre-school have carpet and vinyl tile floor coverings and clear-finished timber joinery.

The roofs are flat, with deep fascias, each pavilion having a main roof with very wide eaves, lined with timber boarding, all around, although the Resource Centre has painted fibre-board soffits. Above each main roof, where learning units have high ceilings, long rectangular upper roofs run north-south over the front pavilions and east-west over the lower back pavilions, projecting well past the main roofs. Rainwater from roofs spill from downpipes into concrete tubs, and there are many overflow pipes regularly spaced along the fascias. The upper roofs have much deeper fascias, originally lined with smooth sheeting painted white, whereas the fascias of the lower roofs are lined with steel sheeting with horizontal joints. Apart from the 1996 Resource Centre, which has white-coloured steel fascias, the fascias of the upper roofs are sheeted in green-coloured steel with vertical joints. The large scale of the white roof planes made the school buildings effective elements in the landscape in which they are set, and the whiteness of the Resource Centre roof gives an indication of that effect. Highlight windows between the roofs give the interior of the Resource Centre clerestory lighting.

At the front of the former school is a memorial, designed by Enrico Taglietti, to John Flynn, consisting of the name 'Flynn' and a plaque on a section of concrete wall similar to those of the school. It is located just inside the school boundary in front of the former Health Centre.

To the east of the former primary school is a flat sports area, enclosed on three sides by concrete-block retaining walls, terminated by two square steel pyramids. In the school and pre-school grounds are significant shade and shelter trees, Greening Australia tree plantings in a row west of the former primary school and two significant pre-settlement Eucalyptus blakelyi trees have been identified.ⁱ

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The suburb of Flynn was planned in 1971, then named in September that year in honour of the Very Rev Dr John Flynn, (1880-1951) OBE, DD, first Superintendent of the Australian Inland Mission and founder of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia. He is an Australian icon, with his image on the \$20 note. Major memorials to him are the John Flynn Memorial Church (1956) in Alice Springs and at Mt Gillen, where his ashes are interred.ⁱⁱ

When the decision was made in 1971 to build Flynn Primary School and Pre-School, ACT education was the responsibility of the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science and the design and construction authority was the National Capital Development Commission.ⁱⁱⁱ The agreement between the NCDC and Enrico Taglietti for him to design the school, for the suburb then referred to as Belconnen 21, explained the latest educational policy:

"It is proposed to introduce into the ACT a new approach to school design, which will provide a flexibility of space... not available in the traditional school." "Education is now seen as a matter of developing latent powers, cultivating attitudes and providing an environment for stimulating activities."

"The need is for a different kind of school in which teaching can proceed flexibly in areas quickly adaptable for different kinds of learning situations. This concept is based on the open plan principle for learning ... (with) accommodation for 70-80 children and two teachers at the smallest level, ultimately in years to come accommodating the whole of the primary departments and all the primary teachers in one large area ..." "It is proposed in this Brief to introduce this concept in a transitional form retaining portions of the traditional school, but adapting portions of the building in line with this new concept".^{iv}

The concept was based on the United States model, with large open spaces and 2-3 teachers using team teaching. Flynn was one of the first primary schools in Canberra specially designed in accordance with this approach, to provide a flexibility of space not available in the traditional school. After Alan Foskett, a senior public servant, returned in 1973 from a study trip to the UK he prepared a new educational brief for ACT schools, proposing the adoption of the UK approach to open-plan learning, using small spaces around a central resource area. The Giralang Primary School complex, designed by Taglietti to such a brief, was opened in 1976, and is the model fully open plan primary school under the new system.^v

The Health Centre was included in the NCDC brief, to be within the school and provide medical, mothercraft and dental treatment. The provision of bulk-billing salaried neighbourhood doctors practising from government surgeries located in government-owned neighbourhood health centres was an important community health policy in the ACT that was unique in Australia. This program was ended and many of the centres were demolished under the Carnell Liberal Government of the late 1990s.^{vi}

Enrico Taglietti produced a design for Flynn Primary School and he had a model made to illustrate it. Two of the four front pavilions were omitted but construction proceeded otherwise as designed, with four learning

units.^{vii} The school and pre-school were completed in time for the 1974 school year.^{viii} As enrollments demanded a fifth learning unit and additional craft, cooking and needlework spaces, a pavilion was designed for that purpose in 1974 and completed in 1975 as the second stage of the school building, but planned differently to the other pavilions. It was located to the south of the original western pavilion and linked to it by a roof. The construction was similar to the first stage of the school.^{ix}

In 1974 the history of John Flynn and the Royal Flying Doctor Service was added to the school's curriculum and featured in visual and performing arts.^x Flynn's widow, Mrs Jean Flynn, visited the school in 1976 and has donated photographs and books to the school.^{xi} The school's four house teams are named Webster, Traeger, Simpson and Hudson after Flynn's RFDS colleagues.^{xii} In November 1980 a national memorial to John Flynn, on the 100th anniversary of his birth, was unveiled at the school by the daughter of Flynn's assistant, George Simpson. It was built by the NCDC and designed by Enrico Taglietti. A version of Flynn's biplane thereafter became the emblem of the school.^{xiii}

In 1975 a ceramic tile panel artwork "Adoration" by Hatton and Lucy Beck, purchased by the NCDC in 1974, was installed in the foyer of the primary school.^{xiv}

A demountable classroom building was erected at the south-east of the school by 1981.^{xv}

In November 1994 a fire destroyed the pavilion housing the 'Red' learning unit. Before the start of the 1995 school year the library was converted into a learning unit and the Health Centre was utilised as a temporary library. A Resource Centre, designed by Enrico Taglietti to be in keeping with the school, was built by the ACT Government on the site of the destroyed pavilion, and opened for the 1996 school year. Funds raised by the school community, mainly for computers, assisted the project.

During the four years from 2001 community artist Lucrecia de Silva and Flynn schoolchildren covered two paths and two stormwater tubs with artwork, three courtyards with murals and five stormwater tubs with mosaics, all being of high aesthetic quality.^{xvi}

In 2006 the ACT Government announced that Flynn Primary School was one of 23 schools and pre-schools which would be closed as part of its Schools Revitalisation Program.^{xvii} Although a submission was made expressing community support for the school to remain open, Flynn Primary School was closed on 20 December 2006. Flynn Pre-School was not closed.^{xviii}

In May 2007 the plaque from the national memorial to John Flynn was removed by the ACT Education Department and held in storage before being returned to the National Capital Authority. Due to pressure from the Flynn community, the plaque was returned, the memorial restored and a Re-dedication Ceremony was held on 11 August 2007.^{xix}

Enrico Taglietti

Taglietti (1926-) studied architecture between 1947 and 1953 and graduated with a *Laurea* (Doctorate) degree from the Milan Polytechnic, where architectural training methods were basically in the Bauhaus tradition, an approach to design whereby art and craft were united. The teachers included such prominent architects as Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Marco Zanuso, Bruno Zevi and Pier Luigi Nervi. Observers suggest that it was Zevi's vision of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architectural style that appears to have most influenced Taglietti's architectural development.^{xxiii}

Enrico Taglietti established his architecture practice in Canberra in 1956 and has constructed some of Canberra's most dynamic buildings. Other than the Flynn Primary School, these include the Town House Motel, 1961, (demolished); Cinema Center, Civic, 1966; ACMA Conference Centre, Barton, 1967; Dickson Library, 1969; Giralang Primary School, 1976; Apostolic Nunciature, Red Hill, 1977 and the Australian War Memorial Annex, Mitchell, 1979. His most significant houses include the McKeown house, Watson, (1965 & 1995); Dingle house, Hughes, 1966; Paterson house, Aranda, 1970 Evans house, Cook, 1971 and Mijuscovic house, Wanniasa, 1983.^{xxiv}

The architectural critic Jennifer Taylor believes "The freedom of his work contrasts with the functional rigidity of much of Canberra's architecture". "Baffle walls and mouldings, stepped and curved forms, come not from the rational dictates of structural determinism, but from his abstract patterning of the shapes of the building to create interest through striking visual spatial effects." Taylor also states, "The exuberance and formal play of Taglietti's architecture has no parallel in the country. It strangely combines the gaiety of much Italian, free-form construction with the sobriety of the heavy forms of Japan's post-war architects. It is an architecture fashioned for mood and visual delight."^{xxv}

Enrico Taglietti was made a Life Fellow of the RAI in 2001 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the RAI in 2007, the highest honour the Institute can bestow. .

ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA PURSUANT TO S.10 OF THE *HERITAGE ACT 2004*;

(b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;

The precinct comprising the former Flynn Primary School and the Flynn Pre-School is valued for its architectural heritage significance to the Canberra community, in particular for the aesthetic quality of the exteriors of the buildings. The more dramatic and spectacular aspects of the idiosyncratic designs of Enrico Taglietti are exhibited here to good effect. The large scale of the roof planes combine with the sculptural forms of the walls to give the school buildings aesthetic value as effective elements in the urban setting. The aesthetic quality of the buildings can also be appreciated on closer inspection. The abstract patterns created by the profiles of the walls and the way they project out to embrace courtyards produce a striking visual effect. The roofs appear to hover over the walls and over each other. The fenestration adds to the aesthetic effect, by following the geometric pattern of the sloping walls. The sculptural qualities of the school's architecture are best appreciated in the spaces between pavilions where the sloping walls and overhanging roofs surround the observer.

The artwork at the former primary school contributes to its aesthetic value, and the large trees in the former school and pre-school grounds enhance the setting of the buildings.

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

The former Flynn Primary School is important for its special association with the move towards open-plan education in Canberra in the 1970s, being designed in 1971 with semi open-plan learning units. This, one of the city's first primary schools specially designed to provide a flexibility of space not available in the traditional school, was successfully planned as a transition between earlier schools designed as collections of classrooms, and schools accommodating whole primary departments in single large areas.

The complex at Flynn is also important for its associations with the architect Enrico Taglietti, who played a significant part in the history of architecture in Canberra. The experience gained by the architect at Flynn enabled him to design the nationally-significant Giralang Primary School, which has a completely open plan with flexible multi-purpose spaces. He has been recognised by the Australian Institute of Architects as its Gold Medallist for 2007. This, the highest honour the AIA can bestow, recognises architects who have produced buildings of high merit, or who have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture.

Soon after the school was opened, associations began between the school and the man after whom the suburb was named, the Very Rev Dr John Flynn, who is an Australian icon, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Study of their history was added to the school's curriculum and featured in visual and performing arts. The associations culminated in the National Memorial to John Flynn being opened at the front of the school.

(j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site

The former Flynn Primary School and Flynn Pre-School complex, as a potential research site, can provide information that will contribute to the understanding of architectural history by students and the general public.

As a former primary school with semi open-plan learning units, Flynn can also provide information that will contribute to the cultural history of the ACT for teacher education and research.

REFERENCES

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- ⁱ John Flynn Community Group, *Significant Trees and Features at Flynn*, location map.
- ⁱⁱ Australian Dictionary of Biography entry for John Flynn.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Alan Foskett, *ACT Education - The Formative Years*, self published, 2000, p 94.
- ^{iv} *Educational Policy*, Architectural Brief 10/71 for Belconnen 21 - Primary, Infants and Pre-School, April 1971.
- ^v Alan Foskett, from his evidence to the ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal NI2010-330.
- ^{vi} Di Herbert, former Principal, Giralang Primary School, pers. comm. to Graeme Trickett, 2004.
- ^{vii} Photograph, in the Taglietti collection, of the model for Flynn Primary School.
- ^{viii} Ken Charlton et al, *The Contribution of Enrico Taglietti to Canberra's Architecture* RAlA (ACT), 2007.
- ^{ix} Drawings and photographs of Flynn Primary School in the Taglietti collection, and building inspection.
- ^x *Flynn Primary School P & C History of Association between FPS and John Flynn...* December 2007.
- ^{xi} *ibid.*
- ^{xii} *Flynn Primary School Flynn's 25th Anniversary Newsletter*, May 1999.
- ^{xiii} *FPS P&C History...*, op cit.
- ^{xiv} *Works of Art in Canberra*, NCDC, 1980, p 7.
- ^{xv} Cathy Nicholl of John Flynn Community Group, pers. comm. to Ken Charlton.
- ^{xvi} *FPS P&C History...*, op cit.
- ^{xvii} Flynn Primary Site, Local Consultation - 1st Session, 30 October 2007.
- ^{xviii} *FPS P&C History...*, op cit.
- ^{xix} "Suburb Welcomes the Return of Flynn Memorial", in *Canberra Times*, 12 August, 2007.
- ^{xxiii} Ken Charlton, op cit.
- ^{xxiv} *ibid.*
- ^{xxv} Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, RAlA, 1990, pp 89-92.