

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R055A

Name of Place: Commandant's House

Other/Former Names: Bridges House

Address/Location: 6 Robert Road DUNTROON ACT 2600

Block Section of

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	RNE
Date of Listing:	1984	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	3	Category:	Military & Residential
Citation Revision Date:	November 03	Style:	Federation Free

Date of Design:	1911	Designer:	Works & Railways
Construction Period:	1911-12	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Defence Department
Date of Additions:		Builder:	

Statement of Significance

An elegant example of an early 20th century official residence, the first and one of the most important of those residences in Canberra. It was designed to house the commanding officer of the Royal Military College, commencing with the first commandant, Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges. The house has strong associations with him and with the development of the College. It is suitably landscaped as part of a unified group of residences and shares common architectural details, massing and forms with the group. It makes a significant contribution to the special character of the oldest portions of the Duntroon campus of the college.

The house has architectural and aesthetic significance as a good example of an early twentieth century official residence in the Federation Free Style, with a combination of elements and details drawn from Classical, Art Nouveau, Georgian and Arts and Crafts styles. The building is in near original condition, including a rare construction material.

Description

The Commandant's House is oriented away from Campbell Road, and overlooks a golf course located to the south-east. The house presents a most impressive image for its distinguished inhabitant and relates well to the other permanent houses erected in the initial construction phase of the college. The design is in the Federation Free Style, with a combination of elements and details drawn from Classical, Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts styles.¹ Indicators of the style present are Classical motifs in the loggia and porch, with stucco as a substitute for stone; Art Nouveau leadlights; asymmetry in some elevations; roughcast wall surfaces and a roof of both hips and gables with wide eaves and exposed rafters in the Arts and Crafts manner; and double-hung windows with Georgian glazing bars in the upper sashes only.

The most prominent feature of the house is the wide loggia located on the south-eastern facade, which consists of paired Tuscan columns supporting an entablature. A terrace above the loggia extends into recesses in the first floor of the house. The low-pitched roof of the house has gables and hips of folded-rib decking. The front door is within a recessed classical round-arched porch in the north-east facade. In and around the door is Art Nouveau leadlight glazing. From the front door the house is entered by way of a hall leading to the stair hall and drawing and dining rooms. Both of these rooms, as well as a study, open onto the loggia.

There is a central fireplace in the drawing room, and another fireplace in the hall. Bedrooms and a bathroom open off the stair hall. The kitchen is located beyond a back stairway, storage areas and a rear porch. The kitchen includes a laundry room and a dining alcove.

On the second floor is the master bedroom, with two dressing rooms and a bathroom; another bedroom with an adjacent bath and sitting area; three bedrooms with built-in wardrobes and a bathroom. The upper stair hall opens onto the terrace over the loggia and drawing room. The terrace overlooks the garden of mature trees and plantings to the golf course beyond.

The house has stone-coloured roughcast and smooth-rendered concrete-block walls. The blocks are very unusual, consisting of precast cementitious plaster-rich material with extrusion holes and straw. ⁴

Condition and Integrity

Good. Except for normal repairs, maintenance and upgrading of service rooms (such as bathrooms and kitchen) there has been little change to the original building. The exterior colour scheme was restored in a program of renovations completed in 1995. The garden is also well cared for. Refurbishment to the services system in 2000 resulted in some adverse effects on the integrity of the building. In consultation with Freeman and Leeson Architects, these were minimised and the existing arrangements recorded. A refurbishment of the kitchen, meals area, main bedroom/ensuite and dressing room and external changes including windows and doors was completed. ⁵

Background/History

See General Background to Royal Military College Precinct. The work on the Commandant's House and other officers' quarters was commenced in October 1911 and the Commandant's House was completed in December 1912. Since then, apart from the 1930-37 period when the RMC was in Sydney, it has been the Commandant's residence. ²

The house compares with a number of other official residences built in the early period of Canberra's development, between 1911 and 1939. ³ These were:

'The Lodge', the residence of the Prime Minister, completed in 1927.

'The Residency', for the Administrator of the Federal Capital Territory, in Acton, completed in 1915.

The Director's Residence, at the Solar Observatory, Mount Stromlo, completed in 1926.

The Director's Residence, at the Australian Institute of Anatomy, in Acton, completed in 1930.

Casey House, for the "Resident Minister in the Capital Territory" but only occupied by the Treasurer, in Yarralumla, completed in 1938.

The Commandant's House was the first of Canberra's purpose-built official residences, and is one of the most important. The design of the building and setting is appropriately elegant and demonstrates the principal characteristics of an official residence.

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

1. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds. *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989.
2. Philip Cox & Partners. *Royal Military College of Australia Duntroon, Conservation & Management Plan*, for Department of Housing & Construction, 1986.
3. Rodney Garnett & Danielle Hyndes, Ed. *The Heritage of the Australian Capital Territory*. National Trust of Australia (ACT), 1992.
4. Eric Martin and Associates, *RMC Duntroon, ACT: Conservation and Management Plan for 13 Residences*, Defence Housing Authority. 2001.
5. Australian Heritage Commission, *Commandants House Place Details 13380*, Register of the National Estate, 2003.

Other Information Sources