

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R119

Name of Place: **Functionalist Style House, Braddon**

Other/Former Names:

Address/Location: 107 Limestone Avenue BRADDON ACT 2612

Block 4 Section 10 of Braddon

Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	None
Date of Listing:	2003	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	1	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	October 2000	Style:	Inter-War Functionalist

Date of Design:	3 April 1940	Designer:	C Whitley
Construction Period:	April 1940 -	Client/Owner/Lessee:	ACT Housing Trust
Date of Additions:	None	Builder:	Unknown

Statement of Significance

The house is a significant example of the Inter-War Functionalist style of architecture and is notable for displaying the high design skill of the the architect Cuthbert Whitley. Most of the indicators peculiar to the Inter-War Functionalist style are exhibited here. They are asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, a roof concealed by parapets and metal-framed windows. The house is valued by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects as a good example of its style.

The design of the house reflects an important aspect of the taste of the period from the onset of the Depression leading up to the Second World War, by demonstrating the way traditional architectural styles were being eschewed in favour of modernism. It is the only surviving example of a Department of the Interior Type 133 House. The creativity of the architect Cuthbert Whitley is apparent in the design of the house, which was innovative when compared with other government housing designed in Australia at the time.

Through its architectural style and urban form this house is a valuable educational resource for designers and planners, and its location on a prominent site reinforces its educational value.

The house is important for its strong associations with the talented architect Cuthbert Whitley, who as Senior Architect held a key position in the Department of the Interior Works Branch and designed some of Canberra's finest public buildings. The design of the house indicates his unfulfilled intentions for Canberra's government housing after 1939 to be modern. If the Second World War had not occurred and if an apparently more conservative architect had not taken over from Whitley, much of Canberra's government housing at that time may have contributed to the advancement of architecture by following the course of modernism.

Description

A Department of the Interior Type 133 house designed in January 1940 in the Department's Canberra Drawing Office. 1 The working drawing was approved by the Senior Architect Cuthbert Whitley in April 1940. 2 It was probably built soon afterwards. 3 The design is attributed to Whitley, as it is a slight modification of his design for the Type 108 house documented in August 1939 when he was Acting Chief Architect. 4 The Inter-War Functionalist style design is related to the modern architecture of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Schröder House in Utrecht (Gerrit Rietveld; 1924) which exhibited principles of the De Stijl theory. 5 Most of the

indicators peculiar to the Inter-War Functionalist style are exhibited here. They are asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, metal-framed windows and a roof concealed by parapets. The corner windows and the cantilevered hood are other significant indicators of the style. 6

The house is single-storied, with walls of red face brick and parapets concealing a low-pitched roof sheeted in asbestos-cement. There are steel-framed windows, with horizontally-proportioned panes, on each of the front corners of the house. Except for the steel windows of the bathroom and toilet, all other windows are timber-framed. The front terrace has a long brick flower-box and a flat roof at window-head height over the entrance and the bathroom, which are the main horizontal elements of the north-east-facing front elevation. Internally, a hall opens to a 4.3m x 3.9m living room on the south-east, which has a large east corner window and a fireplace on its south-west wall. The hall leads to a 3.3m x 3m kitchen facing south-west with a dining nook facing north-west. The kitchen leads via a back porch to a laundry. The hall also leads to a passage, off which is a bathroom, a separate toilet and three bedrooms. The main bedroom, at the front, has a north corner window.

Condition and Integrity

The house is remarkably intact.

Background/History

The Works Branch of the Department of the Interior was headed by Edwin Henderson from the time it was formed in 1932 from the previous Department of Works and the Federal Capital Commission, until he died in June 1939. His position was Principal Designing Architect until early 1936, when it was renamed Chief Architect. At that time there were 11 architects in the Architectural Sub-Section, all working under Cuthbert Whitley, the Senior Architect. They produced Commonwealth Banks and other government buildings throughout Australia. In Canberra the Works Branch was responsible for almost all government buildings including housing. Whitley often acted in Henderson's position, notably for some months in 1936 during which he designed the Patent Office, Canberra High School and Ainslie Primary School. 7

Government houses in Canberra during the 1930s were generally symmetrically laid out in a uniform Mediterranean style with face brick or textured rendered-brick walls and pitched terracotta roofs and some Art Deco geometric decoration. The first radical departure from that style was a venture into the Functionalist style by Henderson, probably in consultation with Whitley, for the firemen's houses at the Forrest Fire Station in 1937. Whitley's opportunity to join the modern housing trend begun in Canberra by private sector architects Moir and Sutherland came with Henderson's death in June 1939. Whitley was in charge of the Works Branch for the next six months. On 9 August he signed a site plan of Section 23 Griffith, with single-storied houses in the Functionalist style, and more conventional residences, laid out mirror-reversed each side of two axes. A 'Residence Type 108' was located on each of the four corner blocks, two of the houses being reversed for symmetry. The central three blocks on Canberra Avenue had other houses in the same style; Type 107 in the centre, its more cubic massing being appropriate as a centrepiece, and Type 111 and Type 111 Reversed on each side of it to complete the symmetry. These all had brick walls painted white and low-pitched roofs behind parapets. Working drawings of the Types 107 and 111 were signed by Whitley as Acting Chief Architect on 16 June 1939 and of the Type 108 on 29 August 1939. 8

War was declared on 3 September 1939 and central staff of the Works Branch were moved to Melbourne in November to become the executive wing of the Allied Works Council. The section which remained in Canberra was involved in projects connected with defence and a diminishing programme of government housing. 9

Later in 1939 the Block Plan for Sections 10 & 15 Braddon was drawn up under Whitley, with some Functionalist style houses: Types 107 and 108, facing Pialligo Street (later renamed Limestone Avenue) and in Torrens Street. Before they were built, James Orwin, the former Works Director in Queensland and later New South Wales, seven years older than Whitley and apparently more conservative, was demoted to Senior Architect but took charge of the Department's Canberra Drawing Office in late December. The only Functionalist style houses built

by the Department in North Canberra appear to have been two on blocks 3 and 4 in Limestone Avenue and four in Torrens Street. All had red face brickwork. They were one of Type 111, three of Type 107, of which one survives in Torrens Street, and two of Type 133 of which the house on block 4 in Limestone Avenue is the only survivor. 10 Government housing in Canberra reverted to a less radical style after Orwin took over from Whitley. For example, the drawing of the Type 107 house was amended about May 1940 by changing the roof to hipped with terracotta tiles and changing the fenestration, which would have altered its character considerably, but none appear to have been built. 11

The planning and design of the Functionalist houses indicate Whitley's intentions for Canberra's government housing to be modern, influenced by the houses in Evans Crescent being constructed in 1939 to designs by Moir and Sutherland and contemporary developments like Jennings' Beaumont estate in Melbourne. 12

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 Cuthbert Whitley is apparent in the design of the house, which was innovative when compared with government housing built in Australia in the 1930s.

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

The house is a significant example of the Inter-War Functionalist style of architecture and is notable for displaying the high design skill of the architect Cuthbert Whitley. Most of the indicators peculiar to the Inter-War Functionalist style are exhibited here. They are asymmetrical massing, simple geometric shapes, metal-framed windows and a roof concealed by parapets. The corner windows and the cantilevered hood are other significant indicators of the style. The house is valued by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects as a good example of its style.

The house compares with the architect Malcolm Moir's own house constructed in 1936 at 43 Melbourne Avenue, Forrest and the Evans Crescent Precinct, Griffith, 1938-40, by Moir and Sutherland. The houses designed by Whitley in June and August 1939 and built soon afterwards in Section 23 Griffith are also comparable.

(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 reflects an important aspect of the taste of the period from the onset of the Depression leading up to the Second World War, by demonstrating the way traditional architectural styles were being eschewed in favour of modernism. The Functionalist style of the house was becoming increasingly popular in the late 1930s in Australia. Few houses were built in the style in Canberra before the outbreak of the Second World War curtailed the government housing programme and otherwise a conservative reaction against such a radical style prevailed.

(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

The house is the only surviving example of a Department of the Interior Type 133 House, although it is very similar to the Type 108, two examples of which survive. The house is remarkably intact.

(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

The house is important for its strong associations with the Department of the Interior Works Branch Senior Architect Cuthbert Whitley who designed some of Canberra's finest public buildings and, with the Chief Architect Edwin Henderson, was responsible for the design and construction of many other Commonwealth government buildings, particularly in Canberra, in the 1930s. The site planning and designs of the few Functionalist houses like this indicate Whitley's unfulfilled intentions for Canberra's government housing after 1939 to be modern. If the Second World War had not occurred and if an apparently more conservative architect had not taken over from Whitley, much of Canberra's government housing at that time may have contributed to the advancement of architecture by following the course of modernism.

(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 and urban form this house is a valuable educational resource for designers and planners, as its architecture is characteristic of the Inter-War Functionalist style. The prominent location of the house on one of Canberra's main avenues reinforces its educational value.

References

1. Microfilm copy in PALM plan room of sketch design Registered No. 11353, signed J. Orwin, Senior Commonwealth Architect, dated 22. 1. 40.
2. Microfilm copy in PALM plan room of working drawing Registered No. 11383, initialled C. W. for J. O., Senior Commonwealth Architect, dated 3. 4. 40.
3. Drainage Plan dated 29. 3. 40.
4. Microfilm copy in PALM plan room of working drawing Registered No. 10577, signed C. Whitley, A/g Chief Architect, dated 29. 8. 39.
5. Patrick Nuttgens. *The Mitchell Beasley pocket guide to Architecture*, 1980, p 167.
6. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds. *Identifying Australian Architecture - Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*. Angus and Robertson, 1989, p 187.
7. Ken Charlton, *The Career of C. C. M. Whitley ARVIA, ARIBA*. Unpublished paper for the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture Committee, RAIA (ACT) Aug 2000, p 1-3.
8. Ibid, p 4.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Microfilm copy in PALM plan room of working drawing of Type 107A Registered No. 12094. Unsigned. Date estimated to be about May 1940.
12. Charlton, p 4.

Other Information Sources