

THE
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY SITE
AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

1954 — 1968

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

1. It was a good omen that when the conditions of the competition for the Australian National Capital were published in 1911 one of the important requirements of the programme was a University Area. Walter Burley Griffin, whose eye for the potentialities of landscape was perhaps his greatest gift, chose the area of land close to Civic Centre which he described as "intersected by a little lagoon arm, bordered by the lowest lake, and at the same time overlooking the entire length of the other four lakes of the chain. This site is also in a position to utilize the botanical gardens and mountain with its forestry reserve".
2. It was in the valley of Sullivan's Creek between Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie that Joshua Moore pastured sheep and cattle soon after 1820 and built the first homestead near the old corroboree ground where Canberra Community Hospital now stands. It was in this valley that the name Canberra or Canberry was first used soon after Joseph Wild discovered Lake George, and when the Snowy Mountains were first seen from a hill near Bungendore. Colonel Scrivener, to whose foresight and careful surveys Canberra owes so much, lived at Acton and the first Administrator of the Federal Territories lived in Canberra House, the most historic building on the University site.
3. The site, chosen in 1912, has remained the site of the University ever since, though its boundaries have had many changes. At Canberra's Foundation Ceremony in 1913 Mr. Fisher, the Prime Minister, said that he hoped that "this city will be the seat of learning as well as politics and the home of the arts", and today this educational area of the Federal Capital includes not only the National University, but such allied activities as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, the Academy of Science and the Institute of Anatomy.
4. This grouping of similar activities is a beneficial arrangement, ensuring that neighbouring land uses are really neighbourly, each protecting the other from alien intruders, adding to the vitality of the group, making possible the sharing of facilities, and increasing the beauty of the whole by the care of its individual parts. It was an added good fortune that, after much uncertainty, Canberra University College was included in this educational precinct, thus laying the foundations of a teaching and research institution that may well become for Australia what the combined Harvard-M.I.T. complex is for the Eastern States of America.

IDEAS BEHIND THE PRESENT PLAN

5. It will be understood that when the present planning proposals for the University were formulated in 1954 the boundaries of the site were quite different from the present boundaries, no decision had yet been made about the future location or administrative arrangements for Canberra University College, nor had the future of Canberra itself been clearly visualized, its rapid growth imagined, or the consequent highway pattern decided upon. A number of buildings, roads and services were in existence on the University site and there were many temporary buildings that could not be removed immediately.
6. Although the future seems clearer now, those with responsibility for the continuing development of the University will be confronted with very similar circumstances: a great many buildings, roads and services are now in being which it would be impractical to ignore, and future unforeseen needs may bring changes even more startling than those that have occurred since the University's foundation only twenty two years ago.
7. In the discussions leading to the adoption of the 1954 plan it was agreed that with what then appeared to be so large and open a site it would be difficult to justify the construction of high-rise buildings; both the economy and the convenience of walk-up buildings was stressed and it was decided that until future demands on land changed the situation, the University should be developed with, generally speaking, buildings of no more than three storeys.
8. The pattern of operations of the various Schools of the Research Institute, which were then the only elements of the plan under consideration, led to the adoption of a plan comprising a series of precincts whose buildings would have a functional relationship, with ample room to satisfy individual requirements and allow for inevitable growth and unforeseen contingencies. This proved to be a practical method of development and when, some six years after the approval of the first site plan, the problems of Canberra University College were added to those of the Research Institute this cellular or precinctal pattern was continued for the School of General Studies.
9. As Mr. Grenfell Rudduck and I explained in our 1955 Reports to Council before the outline plans were first approved:

"It will be apparent that the layout of roads and buildings is informal. This is due largely to the nature of the site, the development already existing, and the fact that an arrangement which permits the free growth of individual sections of the University as the need arises seems better suited to the requirements than a formal plan in which nothing can be varied without destroying the unity of the whole".

"With these circumstances in mind we decided to make each building group to a certain extent self-sufficient so that when the time came to build it could be planned as efficiently as possible for its special purpose and be capable of expansion without interfering with its neighbours".

"We feel that our concept of the University as a series of related but independent groups is in keeping with its real organization and functions".

ARCHITECTURAL DIFFICULTIES, FAILURES AND SUCCESSES

0. Architectural control in the present aesthetically confused period has proved almost impossible everywhere without so deadening the architect that his work becomes dead too. Having appointed a first-class architect it is hard to direct him to conform with the ideas of near-by buildings by other architects. Insistence upon the use of similar materials, colours and roofs may help, though sooner or later functional, economic or aesthetic considerations lead to a departure from any such rules. Even the design of overall three-dimensional "envelopes" within which architects are asked to plan their buildings has proved inimical to the best results. The best answer at present appears to be to choose a good architect and entrust him with a large enough group of buildings to allow him to create a satisfying visual effect over a significant area of the site.
1. It was for these reasons that, after experimenting with the ideas of too many architects, the University agreed to the appointment of Precinct Architects each of whom would be responsible for the overall design of one of the precincts into which the plan was conveniently divided. This sound idea is beginning to produce good results as may clearly be seen by an examination of the group of buildings for the School of General Studies Faculty of Science. Similar results are being achieved in the Oriental Studies-Law buildings, and the latter also go well with the Chancelry-Administration group: the latter will eventually link

with the Library-Theatre-Union Court complex which offers every opportunity for a fine result if left in the hands of one capable designer.

12. There are other buildings, such as the Institute's Geophysics group that will prove highly successful when they are completed, as will also the General Studies Arts-Economics Quadrangle if carried through firmly on the intended lines, though it is difficult to appreciate this while the quadrangle is used as a car park! But not all areas of the site have yet been made the clear responsibility of carefully selected architects: this is an urgent need. It would be impractical to give the whole University to one architect to design and build, but the fewer the architects concerned the easier will it be to programme and administer building developments, and the less opportunity for conflicting architectural styles there will be.
13. There is another way in which the University can assist towards the attainment of better buildings: this is by the preparation of the best possible programmes or briefs for the architect concerned, briefs in which the users of the building have been thoroughly involved. The assembly of adequate information about the requirements of a new building is a much more arduous task than is usually supposed, but it is essential for the success of the project functionally, economically and aesthetically: it is not only good architects who create fine architecture, but good clients as well!

LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND ITS IMPORTANCE

14. From the initiation of the present plans in 1955 it has always been hoped that this new University in its magnificent setting would develop a character quite different from that of European universities or of those older Australian universities near the centres of large urban areas, but appropriate for Australia's National University in the new National Capital. This special character was to be achieved by allowing the landscape itself to be a major element in the design. At present, when the site is littered with building contractors equipment and haphazardly parked cars, and when new tree and shrub planting is too young and on too small a scale to be effective, the University is rather like Canberra before the lakes were made, when the whole intention of the Griffin plan was obscured.

15. A clearly formulated landscape theme is intended to unify the different precinctal building groups and give meaning to the scheme of development. The attached Landscape Plan is necessarily too small to show detail but the following main proposals can be distinguished:

- (a) Sullivan's Creek parkway with its two water basins and tree lined banks.

Those parts of the creek where the engineering works and tree planting have been carried out show clearly the possibilities for a pleasant parkway through the centre of the site, retaining in the main the original line of Sullivan's Creek.

- (b) The Sports Area and the open Glade leading to the Ceremonial Group.

This open space, in a position to be enjoyed by the maximum number of people, separates University House from the Institute's main building group on the ridge to the west and provides a sports oval on the most level area of the original site. The Central Store, built before the 1954 planning proposals, still spoils the appearance of this unified open space.

- (c) The link between the General Studies Zoology building and Union Court.

"College Green" between Burton and Bruce Halls and fronting C.S.I.R.O.'s main building can already be appreciated and is a continuation of the axial development between Zoology and the Union, now apparent on the ground though only in its early stages of planting.

- (d) The Formal Gardens of the Ceremonial Group overlooking West Basin.

These, with the avenue link ending in a tower building near Geophysics, and the courts and gardens round the Great Hall and Art Gallery are all in the future, but it is not difficult to visualize the possibilities of this splendid site of which it would be tragic not to take the fullest advantage when the time comes.

16. A much more determined attack on the task of planting and landscaping is needed: trees take long to grow and should be put in now, or as soon as the completion of construction works in each area makes it possible. Planting of all kinds should be on a much more massive

scale than at present if it is to be effective. Nothing will give better value for money over the years than an intelligent scheme of tree planting, properly maintained.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

17. While the University was small in numbers it would have been foolish to spend large amounts of money on unnecessarily wide roads through the site and existing roads were made use of whenever possible, but the time has now come when some of these old and relatively narrow roads need widening and general improvement to allow proper circulation, including the stopping and movement of public transport vehicles. It would be highly undesirable however if measures for improvement were to be carried to the other extreme and a costly system of wide traffic routes be built at the expense of the peace, quiet and functional efficiency of the University as a whole. Together with road improvements the advantages of an adequate bus service to Civic Centre, perhaps in the form of mini buses operated by the University or by a contractor on their behalf, should be seriously considered.
18. It is common knowledge that no practicable provision of parking spaces can fully satisfy the needs of a large urban university: with a university population of 10,000 there might well be a demand for 6,000 parking spaces if no restrictions on vehicles entering or parking within the University grounds were imposed; such restrictions always give rise to objections but restrictions will prove inevitable at some stage: they should be applied progressively, and the sooner they are applied the less the eventual trouble.
19. I have always been hesitant to involve the University in elaborate parking counts and traffic surveys during the period when it was growing so rapidly that any such surveys would be out of date within a short period. It was not long ago that it was decided that the new Research School of Chemistry should be placed, not with the main group of Institute buildings but at the other end of the site near the Department of Chemistry of the School of Undergraduate Studies: more recently it has been considered that the School of Biological Sciences, which had since 1961 been proposed for a site near the present School of Forestry, might perhaps be better near the John Curtin School of Medical Research.

Such changes as these, as well as new developments of all kinds, naturally alter the whole pattern of traffic movement and the locational demand for parking spaces within the University.

20. Another changing and so far unpredictable factor in the movement of traffic through the University is the growth of Canberra as a whole. A future pattern of suburbs and transport routes is only now emerging and no one can yet be sure of the relative importance of Woden, Belconnen and Majura, as well as the older suburbs, as living areas for members of staff, students and their families. The future attraction of these and other living areas for those connected with the University cannot be established now by any method of counting heads, acres or motor cars! My own view is that if the four University entrances proposed in the 1966 site plan materialize there will be, as was intended, an approximately equal use of each of these entrances, though entrance No.1 will be more important than the rest owing to its proximity to the city centre. I doubt if any survey today can tell much more than that about future traffic movement.
21. It has so far proved impossible to finance the construction of high-rise buildings within the University, though the site plan includes locations for certain important tower structures: it seems likely that for some time to come it will be even harder to find money for multi-storey parking accommodation. This is why the 1966 plan proposed mainly fringe parking at ground level, particularly near the School of General Studies where student population is likely to be heaviest. This fringe parking, particularly along the line of the new Boldrewood Street, could be greatly increased in area, but this would naturally involve the loss of land which could be put to a more useful purpose for teaching, research or recreation.
22. There are however two areas which particularly lend themselves to multi-storey car parks with entrances at different levels, should this be found possible financially: one of these is the sloping ground between Geophysics and the proposed Belconnen Arterial Highway - if the difficult problem of the appearance of the parking decks from West Lake could be satisfactorily solved. Another area which would also be appropriate for multi-level parking is the re-entrant triangle of land off Clunies Ross Street, now part of the Botanic Gardens, if this comes to the University as is now hoped. On these steep slopes a series of parking areas with flat roofs in terraced form would not only give additional parking for the Colleges and Halls of Residence, but might also provide level

roof areas for much needed tennis courts and other recreational facilities in a convenient location.

UNIVERSITY BOUNDARIES AND ENTRANCES

23. My 1966 Report stated:

"Lack of certainty regarding the final boundaries has been a source of difficulty ever since the University was founded; these boundary difficulties have been aggravated by the series of major highways around and even through the site, the need for which only became evident at a relatively late date. It is to be hoped that the highway arrangements now proposed by the National Capital Development prove to be final ones and that the agreement will be adhered to that these major surrounding highways will define the boundaries of the University wherever possible."

"The effect of the above agreement should be to add to the University site the very valuable piece of ground, at present part of the area of the Canberra High School, to the east of Ellery Circuit opposite the Administration Buildings and the Students' Union, and also whatever remains of the land to the east and west of Sullivan's Creek between the present University boundaries and the reserve for the Belconnen Highway: all of these areas would be of great value to the University, and of little value to anyone else."

"It would be highly desirable if the area of the Institute of Anatomy were to come within the University grounds so that the northern end of Liversidge Street would no longer be a public road: a single entrance gateway could then be placed at the junction of Liversidge Street and Ellery Circuit. This would avoid the twin gateways that the present boundary makes necessary at Entrance (2) near University House - and would also conform to the spirit of the agreement that the University boundaries should follow the lines of the surrounding highways."

24. The gazetting of its permanent boundaries is a most important matter for the University to resolve: associated with it is the control of the use of roads within these boundaries and the final location of entrances to the University; the latter will sooner or later have to be controlled, it is therefore important that there should be as few of them as practicable. At present four carefully located entrance points have been suggested as follows:

- (1) On University Avenue at the eastern boundary, immediately before the proposed bridge from the city centre over the new Belconnen Highway.
- (2) Near University House at the junction of Garran Road and Liversidge Street.
- (3) At the entrance to Dickson Road from Clunies Ross Street, opposite the C.S.I.R.O. Computer Centre building.
- (4) Off Boldrewood Street opposite McCaughey Street connecting with the proposed road link from Boldrewood Street to University Avenue.

25. The final positions of these entrances, especially entrance (1) and (2), will be dependent upon the exact location of the University boundaries and the design of the surrounding highways. These problems are stated more fully in my November 1966 Report on the Development Plan.

RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

26. The whole of the top of the University site along the lower slopes of Black Mountain has been set aside as a residential area which, with the Botanic Garden land if this becomes available, would accommodate up to 2,500 students in an excellent situation. But in my report of 7th July 1964 I pointed out that it would be unwise to provide for as many students as this, on this rather difficult building land, in traditional college-type three or four storey buildings which would spread across the site leaving insufficient space for parking and recreational areas. I had hoped to see tower blocks of eight storeys or more grouped around community facilities, but this has so far proved impossible to achieve.
27. This residential area is in fact now likely to be too small for the provision of the desirable recreational and associated facilities: that is why I am anxious that the University should secure any residual land between its present boundary, Clunies Ross Street, and the future Belconnen Highway. Further additions to student residential population in this area should be made only after most careful consideration - and then traditional, space-demanding buildings should be avoided. But this whole matter of the most suitable type of student accommodation for today is I understand under review by the University.

28. Residential areas are also provided overlooking West Basin on either side of the formal gardens leading down from the Ceremonial Group. Few other uses would be so appropriate in this fringe position of the University: it should not be thought that the National Capital Development Commission's objections to the proposal for the post-graduate Hall of Residence near the Academy of Science were based upon its residential character, the objections were architectural ones. But in these areas the buildings should be kept low to avoid conflict with the Great Hall of the University, and 600 students would appear to be the maximum that should be provided for, including those in University House nearby. There would then be over three thousand students in residence on the site.

SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

29. An important matter for consideration is whether there should be a second Sports Oval within the main University site. Two Ovals were provided in the 1955 plan but, when an additional sports area became available to the north of Boldrewood Street, the University decided to omit one Oval to allow for further development of the Natural Science Buildings of the School of Undergraduate Studies. With the growth of student population, and the increasing demands being made on sports facilities in Canberra generally, there may be a change of opinion.
30. Should it be considered that an additional Oval on the University site was needed, two areas are available: the first of these is between Sullivan's Creek and Boldrewood Street which would be an admirable site for the purpose, but the area is at present reserved for the future needs of the School of General Studies. I believe that it would also be possible, though further studies would be necessary to find whether this was in fact the case, to create an additional Oval immediately south of the present Sports Area No.2. An Oval in this position would have only a small effect on land available for teaching or research: it would involve the removal of the Central Store, which has always been intended, and also the re-alignment of Garran and Eggleston Roads, but such a change might well improve the overall road pattern of the University.
31. There will be demands for other different kinds of sports and recreational facilities that would need space on or near the site, and the University will naturally be anxious to satisfy these so far as is reasonable: now is the time to establish real needs

and priorities and allocate areas while these are still available. All too soon the site, which appears so open, will be more than fully built up.

PRESENT AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

32. For the successful development of the University it is clear that no physical plan can succeed without sufficient forethought for future change and growth. This will require continuous application by those concerned with policy and planning at all levels: for example, if the University is serious in its intention to limit its student population to 7,000, it will need intensive work and collaboration with the proper Government authorities to ensure that there are alternative opportunities for higher education in the Canberra area before the Australian National University reaches this optimum figure.
33. It was thirteen years ago that the Buildings and Grounds Committee of the University of Sydney agreed that student population should not grow beyond the figure of 12,000, but it was not until the students numbered some 16,000 that, through the establishment of the new Macquarie University and other measures, the University was able to put into operation a quota system which is now, with difficulty, holding steady its student population.
34. Among the foreseeable problems to be met will be a growing demand for satisfactory Social and Club facilities for University staff at all levels - teaching, research, administrative, technical and others. Student Health, Welfare and Guidance facilities will need more and more space as will the essential Shops, Services and Concessions that should become part of the Union Court complex. A good and appropriate site has been reserved for a large Indoor Sports Centre.
35. Discussions are already taking place regarding extensions to the Menzies Library and for accommodation for the Performing Arts. It seems likely that teaching and research facilities for Agriculture and Medicine will be required and the University may also wish to provide for teaching and research in Fine Arts and Music. There may be need for additional accommodation for short-time visitors to the University, perhaps in the form of a University Hotel. The proper siting and design of all these, and still other unforeseeable requirements, will need continuous thought on the part of all concerned.

36. There are also certain matters that need immediate attention no matter what the future may be. A great deal of harm to the University's reputation, and considerable damage to relationships between the University and Governmental Authorities in Canberra, has resulted from the appearance of the buildings of the Research School of Physical Sciences, particularly as seen from Black Mountain, which is now a popular tourist place, and from the road approach along the shores of West Lake.
37. The above matter is well known: proposals in the site plan for the two carefully placed buildings - one between the John Curtin School and the east end of the Cockcroft Building and one between Mathematics and the west end of the Cockcroft Building - would do much to improve the situation if carried out. The extensive tree planting along the south bank of Sullivan's Creek, now being implemented, will eventually help matters: but nothing short of complete re-modelling will prevent the Cockcroft and associated buildings being a continuing and notorious eyesore. For the sake of the University's good name this matter should be put right.
38. Motor cars and trucks at present appear to be parked without control throughout the site: some of this cannot be avoided because of building operations, but there is an urgent need to establish - and particularly to plant appropriately with screening trees and shrubs - permanent car parks in the approved locations wherever this is practicable. It should then become possible to control indiscriminate parking on any available piece of open land.
39. A policy matter requiring special attention concerns the part reduction in area of the north eastern section of the University site to allow for the alignment of the Belconnen Highway. The Union Court complex with its future Theatre, Concessions and extended Union Building will be in urgent need of additional space for parking and associated facilities. When the Belconnen Highway is constructed there will be an area of land, now part of the High School site, between the Highway and the University's present boundary. This area should be brought within the University in conformity with the understanding that the surrounding main traffic routes would in general define the limits of the University.

40. The above area of land immediately east of Ellery Circuit, opposite the Administration and Union buildings, would be of special value to the University: for example the location would be an excellent one for high-rise apartment type accommodation for University staff, students and others. Such a project might well be developed in association with private enterprise and in collaboration with the National Capital Development Commission, and should include ground level or preferably multi-storey parking facilities. The character and scale of such development would be appropriate to this location so near the city centre, and where tall buildings would not overshadow other buildings in the University.

THE GREAT HALL AND CEREMONIAL GROUP

41. I was convinced, as long ago as 1955, that the site between Balmain Crescent and Liversidge Street on the high ground overlooking West Basin would be the best location for the future Great Hall of the University and its associated buildings: increasing familiarity with the site over the years has confirmed this opinion, and even the difficulties arising out of later proposals for the Belconnen Highway have not changed my conviction that a properly handled Ceremonial Group in this location, with its splendid backdrop of Black Mountain and its link with the great Water Axis of Canberra to which Walter Burley Griffin gave such importance, could become one of the finest and most magnificently sited groups of buildings in any university. The idea of this proposal was clearly indicated on the coloured perspective drawing prepared in 1965.
42. I believe that there would be great disadvantages in the adoption of any other location for this Ceremonial Group which, not being for everyday teaching or research purposes, and requiring provision for large scale parking and traffic movement on special occasions would, if placed in a more central location, disrupt the normal working of the University, occupy land more suitable and more convenient for other University purposes, while losing the benefits of an outstanding site.
43. This, the most important group of buildings on the site, affords a opportunity for the creation of a memorable symbol of the University in a location where it would become an important element in the Canberra scene, especially as viewed from West

Basin or from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. It would surely be appropriate that this supremely important element in the University should be the subject of an architectural competition, or that at least this should be the case with the Great Hall, on the assumption that the architect chosen for this major work would become Precinct Architect for the whole group.

CONCLUSION

44. After recent visits to many overseas Universities and a subsequent re-examination of the A.N.U. present and proposed development I am satisfied that the principles expressed in the 1955 Reports by Grenfell Rudduck and myself, and adhered to since that time so far as was possible, were valid ones that have proved themselves by the way in which the plan has been able to absorb successfully so many changes and new requirements over the last twelve years: the most important of these principles are as follows:
 - (1) That the plan be capable of adaptation to meet new needs as they arise.
 - (2) That buildings with related functions be grouped.
 - (3) That each building group be capable of extension to meet its own particular requirements.
 - (4) That existing developments of value be retained wherever practicable.
 - (5) That the natural and man-made landscape be considered major elements in the scheme.
 - (6) That the Ceremonial Group be located in the best possible position, visually as well as practically.
45. I am concerned lest, in an attempt to achieve a more striking, more monumental, or more uniform architectural effect, the University may find itself in a straight jacket of non-adaptive physical facilities, less efficient, economical, or pleasant for its various occupants, than the more permissive and adaptable design theme that has been developed. In spite of architectural failures, I do not fear a lack of design quality if the present proposals are carried through with firmness and continuity - and with the landscape elements taken as seriously as the buildings themselves. No site plan can by itself ensure good architecture,

it can only give opportunities to good architects: some of these opportunities have been well taken in the Australian National University.

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NOTES.

- a) Most of the ideas and decisions about the University have evolved as a succession of new problems arose during the last twelve years. Ideas about the development were explained more fully in a series of reports with their accompanying plans of which the following are the more important: (1) Preliminary Development Plan - 28.7.55 (2) Site Development Proposals - 2.10.55 (3) Site Boundaries - 20.10.60 (4) Canberra University College Revised Development Plan - 29.11.59 (5) Second Report on the layout of the Combined Site - 24.12.60 (6) Development Plan - 28.11.61 (7) Capacities of the Site for Teaching and Residential Accommodation - 7.7.64 (8) Development Plan - 30.11.66.
- b) The three plans accompanying this report are reductions from large scale plans already submitted: they are too small to distinguish details but Plan No.1 shows clearly the major landscape proposals; Plan No.2 shows present and proposed roads through the site, and existing and proposed parking areas accommodating 2,000 cars; Plan No.3 shows the functional grouping of buildings and suggests seven main precincts each of which should be under the control of one precinct architect to achieve a unified design.







