

NATIONAL TRUST (ACT) AWARDS 2021

REPORT FROM JUDGING PANEL

It was a pleasure this year to have nine projects to consider for awards, despite the challenges met by the people of Canberra. The judging panel consisted of Dr Rosemary Hollow, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra Faculty of Arts, who has expertise in natural and cultural heritage management; Dr Ken Heffernan, Chairperson of the ACT Heritage Council and its expert in archaeology and Ken Charlton AM LFRAIA, an architectural historian and member of the National Trust of Australia (ACT) Heritage Committee.

Three entries each received an Award for an Outstanding Project:

Thoroughly Modern

This is a highly significant publication that makes an important contribution to the appreciation of heritage, beyond detailing the life of two significant architects whose work had a major impact on the development of Canberra in the 20th century. Peter Freeman has detailed its social, cultural and political life during the years Malcolm Moir practised with Heather Sutherland and later. Moir saw Canberra's evolution from a small country town into a major national city. The well-researched book also provides important photographic records and plans of houses which sadly no longer exist. It includes a record of the city's developing architectural styles and the changing social, economic and political situations that impacted on these styles.

Owen Flats

The architect Philip Leeson and developer JWLand have impeccably conserved and given a new economically viable use to this representative sample of one of the building types in the 1962 Northbourne Housing Precinct. The precinct, originally of 169 units for community housing, has a pivotal place in Canberra's architectural and planning history. In the early days of the NCDC era it formed the gateway to the city. The project is an excellent model for the other, yet to be conserved, representative buildings which have survived recent redevelopment to also be adapted to meet contemporary living standards.

The Senate Chamber Conservation Project

The Museum of Australian Democracy has continued its expert conservation work at Old Parliament House. The closure of the Senate Chamber in 2020 provided an opportunity for important restoration work to be undertaken. The walls have been repaired, as have the high surrounding windows, after removing the 1970s panels which covered them. This has made the Senate Chamber a brighter and more welcoming space. The artificial lighting has also been improved, while keeping the original massive pendant lights. New hoists have made their maintenance easier, and an original manual winch has been kept for posterity.

Four entries were each awarded a Certificate for a Significant Contribution to Heritage Conservation:

Blundells Cottage Interpretation Strategy and Responsive Web App and Mobile Tour

Located at a prominent location by the lake foreshore, Blundells Cottage is one of Canberra's oldest buildings, occupied from 1860 until 1958. However, the cottage, due to its age and siting, has access issues and until now lacked good interpretation to tell its history and the stories of the people who lived in it. The well researched and designed web app which is easily accessible on any device, even without physically visiting the cottage, is a highly effective tool that meets these needs. It provides information and images of the interiors, which are particularly useful during Covid. The National Capital Authority is to be commended for this strategy, which can be a model for similar projects at its other properties.

Burley and Brave

An innovative enterprise by Marisa Martin and David Tynan which produces a variety of high quality Canberra themed products, notably jewellery, toys and miniatures of the Capital Territory's icons, both tangible and intangible. By appealing to people of all ages locally and overseas, including visitors seeking souvenirs, a greater appreciation of architectural heritage places is being achieved. This is a unique way to engage people with Canberra's social and cultural history.

Wings of Dickson

This exhibition was a highly successful one-day event with significant community involvement by the Dickson Residents Group and others. It demonstrated the impact that a dedicated community group can have by increasing awareness of a region's history and heritage. The result was people's knowledge of Canberra's first aerodrome and aircraft disaster extended beyond those who attended the exhibition; there was also good publicity in the media.

ACT and Region Heritage Festival

Heritage festivals in the ACT have grown enormously in recent years. The 2021 festival had a myriad of activities and was highly successful. The events, located mainly within the Territory, celebrated natural, cultural, historic and indigenous heritage, and participants of all ages attended, including family groups. The ACT Heritage Unit is to be congratulated for the way the festival was conceived, organised and carried out.

Two entries did not receive an award:

Dominion Circuit House

This commendable project involved alterations and sympathetic additions to an already much-altered home located in the Forrest Housing Precinct. The result is a home fit for contemporary living which blends into the precinct, but the work does not meet the criteria for a building conservation project.

Commonwealth Avenue Bridge Heritage Assessment

It is heartening to have this important bridge recognised for its heritage significance. However, although there was comprehensive community consultation, this is a heritage assessment, rather than a community project. The project's contribution to heritage conservation is not sufficient for it to be given an award.