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Commonwealth of Australia Jubilee Celebrations
1901-1951

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
OF CANBERRA

Prepared under the authority of the
Minister for the Interior (Hon. W. S.
Kent Hughes, M.V.O., O.B.E., E.D.,
M.P.), on the occasion of the 1951
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F O R E W O R D

On behalf of the Government and the Department of Interior, I extend to all delegates a welcome to the Congress in the Federal Capital. I trust that your deliberations will be beneficial and successful and that all visitors will enjoy their stay in Canberra.

W. S. Ken Hughes

MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE INTERIOR

Canberra

August, 1951.

Early Development and Administration

By C. S. DALEY, O.B.E., B.A., LL.B.

ONE of the obligations imposed by the Commonwealth Constitution Act, 1900, was the establishment of the Seat of Government in Federal Territory, where Australia would be "mistress in her own house"—to quote the words of her first Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton.

In 1903 the Commonwealth Government appointed a Royal Commission to inspect and report on sites suggested. Selection of a site was not an easy matter, but finally, in 1908, under the Seat of Government Act of that year, steps were taken to delimit an area in the Yass-Canberra district. In 1909 an agreement was signed, and ratified by legislation, for the surrender by the State of New South Wales, and the acceptance by the Commonwealth, of the present Australian Capital Territory, together with an area of twenty-eight square miles at Jervis Bay as a port. This Territory was vested in the Commonwealth as from 1st January, 1911. The agreement also gave the Commonwealth the right to use the waters of the Snowy River and other streams for hydro-electric development, and to control the catchment areas of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers for the purpose of the ornamental lakes.

The Territory comprises an area of approximately 940 square miles, 170 of which are reserved from occupation as the catchment area of the Cotter River and for water supply purposes.

In selecting the site for the future city it was kept in mind that the position should be commanding, with extensive views, and embracing distinctive features for planning.

An international competition, promoted in 1911 for the design of the city, resulted

in one hundred and thirty-seven schemes being submitted.

The Minister awarded the first premium to the late Mr. Walter Burley Griffin, of Chicago, U.S.A. His plan is based on three axes: one, in a north-easterly direction, between Red Hill and Mount Ainslie; and two parallel transverse axes between Black Mountain and Russell Hill in a south-easterly direction. The main focus (Capital Hill), the Governmental Triangle on the south side of the Molonglo River and the future central lake basin, balance the main axis. Parliament House on the higher elevation, flanked by future administrative buildings, is located in a large park with an open vista leading to the Australian War Memorial at the foot of Mount Ainslie. The Civic focus is separated from the National Centre, and is across the river on the northern approach from the governmental area. Residential suburbs are disposed on both sides of the river.

Mr. Griffin was invited to come to Australia in 1913 to discuss modifications of his design. Subsequently, he was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction, but, under war conditions, only slight progress was practicable. Prior to the termination of his appointment in 1920, however, Mr. Griffin proceeded with the development of his plan and published the last revision on 18th March, 1918.

After the war situation had passed, the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, with Sir John Sulman, Town Planner, as its Chairman, was appointed in January, 1921, to draw up a detailed scheme for the transfer of the Seat of Government based on Griffin's plan. Its schemes were approved and their execution commenced. In January, 1925, the Federal Capital Commission was appointed to administer the

Australian Capital Territory, undertake the development of the city, and provide for the transfer of departments to Canberra.

Concurrently with the holding of the international competition, steps had been taken to develop schemes for engineering services and to provide materials and power for constructional purposes; measures were also taken to provide for the officials and workmen required during constructional stages. These operations, curtailed during the 1914-18 war, were recommenced in 1921.

The preliminary constructional period terminated with the official opening of Parliament House on 9th May, 1927. Hotel accommodation, office space, printing works, official residences, schools, halls and other buildings had been established, together with private enterprise housing and initial shop development; allied to which were completion of the main outfall sewerage scheme, roads, water supply, recreational and transport facilities.

Constructional work was again affected by the incidence of the depression and necessity to curtail expenditure. For several years, following the abolition of the Federal Capital Commission in 1930, orderly development, which had characterised the preceding five years, was impossible.

However, with the easing of the financial situation, further expansions occurred, including the re-transfer of the Royal Military College (removed to Sydney in 1930), extension of the aerodrome, construction of the Australian War Memorial, a section of the National Library, and additional office accommodation, and further development of residential areas.

As the city has developed, planting of avenues, roads and parks has proceeded in an extensive manner, stock being raised in nurseries established in 1913. Experience indicated that the most suitable varieties were pines, deciduous types from colder climates such as oaks, poplars, elms, planes, and several varieties of the cedar and cypress families. Eucalypts have also been extensively utilized. Long-range re-afforestation has also been undertaken as con-

siderable portions of the Territory were lightly timbered, the bulk of the work being carried out in the water supply catchment area.

Outdoor sport has been well catered for, recreation grounds of the larger type being provided and maintained by the Government. Tennis-courts, bowling-greens and hockey fields are being made available to clubs for a small charge to cover cost of improvements, but are maintained by clubs.

Educational, health-service and cultural facilities are provided on an adequate scale; social life, clubs and societies are active, and there is excellent voluntary service given in such fields as mothercraft, nursery and pre-school development, and the hospital.

Development was again brought almost to a standstill during the war years 1939-45, but now shows signs of improvement to meet the demands of public departments and a rapidly increasing population.

Despite difficulties encountered owing to two world wars, coupled with an intervening period of economic depression, Australia has, nevertheless, contrived to go a long way towards the fulfilment of the obligations imposed by the Constitution to establish a national capital providing favourable conditions for the conduct of the important functions of the Commonwealth Parliament and the administrative departments.

Moreover, Canberra has an acknowledged status amongst world capitals, especially since the establishment within its gates of diplomatic representatives of many countries, and the High Commissioners of the British Commonwealth.

Much, however, yet remains to be done: large Departments await removal to Canberra; a heavy programme of work is involved in providing adequate community facilities, the execution of the Lakes Scheme, the construction of permanent buildings for Government requirements, and other features inherent in the plan of the design for the city, before Canberra can be regarded as comparable to other Federal Capitals, and an exemplar of Australian ideals, a repository for its traditions, and a continuing aspiration to its people.

Recent Development—and Problems

By T. R. GIBSON, A.R.I.B.A., A.M.T.P.I., M.T.C.P.I.

Some of the problems in relation to the planning and development of the Australian Capital, and proposals to provide for present-day needs and future requirements.

ADMINISTRATION

UNDER the Seat of Government Administration Act and Ordinances, the Department of the Interior is responsible for developmental planning in the Australian Capital Territory. The National Capital Planning and Development Committee, appointed by ordinance, also makes recommendations on matters concerning planning; and the Minister may also refer matters on which he desires local opinion to the Advisory Council, a body including elected representatives of the Territory residents.

RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

With the control afforded by the adoption of a leasehold policy of land tenure, tendency to sub-divide residential blocks into small areas has been avoided; indeed, within curtilage measurements, sites of between 90,000 and 130,000 square feet are to be found on the south side of the City. The average site exceeds 10,000 square feet, but some of 5,000 square feet have been provisionally developed. The area predominating in recent sub-division is between 6,500 and 8,000 square feet, desirable dimensions which do not burden the tenant with undue responsibilities of garden maintenance, whilst at the same time avoiding any tendency, by Canberra's standards, to overcrowding.

Preference for detached houses is pronounced in Australia, and residential development in Canberra has followed this precedent. (In a recent survey the recommended ratios were: Individual or semi-detached houses, 89 per cent.; accommodation in flats, 5 per cent.)

The low density, which varies between 1 and 14 persons per net acre for individual houses, and 33 persons per acre net in the case of flats, has contributed to several aspects of planning which do not necessarily pertain elsewhere. Canberra's present population (more than 22,000) now occupies 2,650 acres (not including open spaces or reserves for special purposes), and extends five miles (N-S) and four miles (E-W). Residential roads, with exceptions, are 100 ft. wide; recent practice is for internal roads to have a width not exceeding 70 ft. (Roads occupy about 30 per cent. of the developed areas.)

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

With cessation of hostilities in 1945, departmental construction programmes have been on an annually-increasing scale: from 60 houses constructed in the first year, the number rose to 564 in 1950, with an anticipated 800 for the year ending 1951. During these years hostels accommodating 3,000 were provided, and 100 flats, together with additional accommodation for the several defence establishments. To assist in accommodating persons awaiting individual housing accommodation the Department has recently introduced prefabricated houses to Canberra.

The resident population now exceeds 22,000. The natural increase is more than 30 per 1,000 (having reached as high as 45 per 1,000 in 1947); the marriage rate exceeds 8 per 1,000. These factors contribute to the housing shortage, apart from expansion of existing departments and commercial activities, and any considera-

tions arising from the transfer of additional departmental staffs to Canberra.

HEIGHT ZONING

Few vertical points of identification within the city development are noticeable, and the regulations require that buildings shall not exceed two storeys in height, except with the express approval of the Minister.

However, provision is made in the approved plan for prominent buildings at the two main focal points, Capital Hill, (as the apex of the Governmental Triangle) and the City Hall, facing the main commercial area.

The two Secretariat blocks in the Governmental Area are structures of three storeys, with a recessed fourth storey. The administrative building now under construction will be of five storeys, in addition to basements.

To increase density, approval has been given for residential buildings of three storeys. This policy will be extended.

Two prominent sites have been allotted for cathedrals and when these are erected, dominating points of architectural interest should result.

COMMUNICATIONS

In Canberra's layout a multiplicity of roads is noticeable, with consequent small areas of sub-division. Whilst not considered by some as a disadvantage, this increases traffic hazards particularly where main avenues are crossed. In recent development plans the latter junctions are reduced by as much as seventy-five per cent.

With exceptions, main avenues (of two hundred feet width) are ornamental in both purpose and character; many of these converge upon unusually large rotary junctions. Steps have already been taken to ensure that both avenues and junctions are planned more in keeping with their function, thus overcoming disabilities of a layout plan designed in an era during which the horse and buggy were just giving place to the automobile. This is essential to suit a city now possessing more private cars per head of population than elsewhere in Australia (one to every seven persons).

In commercial and business zones, segregation to canalise traffic is becoming necessary, and, zoning has been more clearly defined to deal with today's problems. With commercial and governmental areas defined by distance, the car-parking problem becomes acute in each zone at distinct periods and could prejudice efficiency if not properly catered for at this stage. Whilst kerbside and near-side parking facilities have been provided to a degree, latest plans provide for off-street areas co-ordinated with places of destination, assisting the flow of traffic in each area. Bicycles and motor-cycles are also taken into account in provision for parking.

COMMUNITY AMENITIES

The housing shortage is not the only problem with which the city is faced. With an increasing population, the shortage of community facilities is acute. In each neighbourhood, community centres have been planned to contain shopping, mothercraft and pre-school play centres, indoor cultural and outdoor recreation, but, in most instances, the related buildings have still to be provided.

A similar lack arises in the central area, where an olympic standard swimming pool, development of a central park, a central sports ground (initially commenced), the theatre group, main indoor recreation areas, and other cultural or recreational facilities are proposed.

Educational needs are receiving attention and further new schools will soon be commenced. Construction of the National University has begun; but the Canberra University College is still housed in provisional accommodation. Proposals are also being considered for a new Technical College, which has also functioned in provisional buildings.

Plans are being prepared for extensions to the Community Hospital to provide up to 800 beds, with auxiliary services.

Mothercraft and pre-school play centres are being developed in the neighbourhood centres in keeping with the overall growth of the city.

LANDSCAPING

During initial development in 1913, the Capital was provided with a horticultural

nursery in which experiment and research have been conducted to assist both city planting and afforestation. Most of the park areas were planted in earlier stages together with planting to screen less-sightly public utility works.

Avenue and street planting has kept pace with development, and in selecting trees and shrubs for this purpose, care has been taken to attain an effective colour contrast throughout the year.

The area of reserves in the city district exceeds 500 acres; afforestation areas exceed 15,750 acres.

The prohibition of front fences and the substitution of hedges has greatly assisted a garden conception. The Department advises on the general landscaping of residential blocks, and annually sets aside trees and shrubs for use in Canberra's private gardens.

EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY

Canberra presents an unusual problem in relation to industrial and commercial development and the possibilities for employment in spheres outside the Commonwealth Public Service.

The city was established to fulfil the purposes of a national capital, and anything which may affect this must receive careful consideration.

On the other hand, it is desirable that opportunities be afforded to the young people of the Territory to enter a wider range of employment than may be found in minor industries and those associated with the production of building materials required for development and maintenance. At present approximately eighty per cent. of the employed population is concerned with governmental activities; those engaged in commercial and other private enterprise pursuits represent the balance.

The growth of Canberra's population is difficult to determine, but it seems clear that a figure of 60,000 will be capable of realisation. (Areas designated for future development could accommodate a population of 100,000, beyond which the city would become the central core around which satellite communities would arise.) The growth and development of the Com-

monwealth will naturally be reflected in its capital city and, further institutions and establishments of quasi-national character and cultural foundations will be provided.

An area of 1,000 acres has been set aside for industrial development, and it is intended that the treatment shall be in accordance with ideals as to the character of buildings and harmonious arrangement, associated with planting.

Pending establishment of a permanent area, there has grown up at Kingston a considerable aggregation of industrial activity, both governmental and private, the latter being on short term leases; the whole being subject to review and dispersal.

AGRICULTURE AND LAND USE

Of the 576,000 acres in the Territory, nearly 360,000 are allotted for rural occupation. The plains and river valleys include a proportion of lands for farming, dairying and fruit-growing, but the bulk of the land outside the city area is average grazing quality. For water supply catchment purposes 108,000 acres are reserved from all occupation.

The chief climatic conditions affecting land-use in the Territory for farming activities are the severity of the summer drought and the reduced length of growing season owing to the early onset of frosts.

Farming areas of the market-garden type are relatively small in extent and lie mostly along the alluvial flats and gently sloping lands near and through the city area. Dairying lands are mostly on river frontages.

Though the Territory is not essentially a wheat growing district, this crop is sown to some extent in rotation with sheep-breeding and fattening. Cattle-grazing is carried on mainly in the southern areas of the Territory.

Though local orchardists find markets within the city, the residents rely largely on outside sources for vegetables and fruit.

It is expected that with improved marketing systems and access roads, Canberra will benefit directly from the productive areas around Tumut on the west, and those on the east, and particularly from

the irrigation areas of the Murrumbidgee as a result of the Snowy Development scheme.

REQUIRED DEVELOPMENT

The city has now reached a developmental stage at which the advantages and disadvantages must be assessed in the light of modern essential requirements. These affect areas set aside in the plan for community centres; land for additional recreational and cultural requirements; additional central and local shopping facilities; schools, and land for private, residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

Owing to war conditions and subsequent concentration upon the vital provision of housing, the development programme has become unbalanced and it is most important that this situation be corrected, so that those amenities enjoyed by dwellers in other Australian cities may be fully available for the comfort, convenience and welfare of the population. Despite the physical attractions of Canberra, it would be difficult to provide staff for the Commonwealth departments and private enterprise activities, if conditions in the national capital are less attractive than those found in the larger centres of population.

ASSESSMENT

With the initial layout determined, the town-planner is concerned mainly with providing for the satisfactory development and adaptation of the approved plan. Conceptions of layout have necessarily changed in the intervening forty years since the award was made to the Griffin plan. Apart from the location of avenues and streets,

and the designation of areas for governmental and other purposes, the original designer has left few indications as to his intentions for the more detailed development of his design.

It has been, on many occasions, found necessary to vary the original layout for both practical and economic reasons. These amendments have been approved and gazetted by the Minister under the terms of the Seat of Government Act.

Closer survey of the physical aspects of each area has enabled more account to be taken of watercourses, recorded flood levels, and geological implications, than could have been possible when the initial design was prepared outside the country. These factors have resulted in the development of areas having improved landscape potentialities, and in the provision of natural reserves for minor recreation and future inter-communicating cycle, equestrian and pedestrian tracks, removed from main traffic routes.

Opportunities have been taken to turn the frontages of residential neighbourhoods away from the main traffic avenues, and to focus the later-developed areas around their natural community centre of interest. The avenues are thus reserved to function as collectors and distributors for transit between place of work and place of residence, over distances which are increasing in proportion to the population served.

A continuous effort is being made to ensure that the city provides adequately not only for its resident population, but also for the continually expanding flow of tourists to whom the Capital is a constant attraction.