

Theme: Creative endeavour/architecture – CB Alexander Campus of Tocal College

Note: Tocal's thematic history has been prepared as part of the assessment of the site's heritage significance in the 2012 (draft) conservation management plan.

Australian heritage theme: 8. Developing Australia's cultural life

NSW heritage theme: Creative endeavour

In 1963 the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church were granted the estate of CB Alexander for the purpose of establishing an agricultural college on the Tocal property. In that year the Church commissioned architects Philip Cox and Ian McKay to design the new College. The architects' working drawings were approved in November 1963, the contract for the construction of the College was finalised in January 1964 and construction commenced shortly after (Hunt, 1972).

In 1965, the year the College opened, the campus buildings won the Blacket Award for a Building of Outstanding Merit, presented by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, NSW Chapter. In the same year Philip Cox and Ian McKay were also awarded the Sir John Sulman Architectural Prize for the outstanding merit of the Tocal campus buildings.

Tocal College is situated on the hilltop immediately south of the historic Tocal Homestead. The principal components of the College complex consist of lecture rooms, teaching laboratories, assembly hall, administration area, staff offices, library, student residential facilities including bedrooms, dining room and kitchen, and several staff residences. The College was initially designed with a capacity of 92 residential students.

Dormitory and teaching buildings, with courtyards, are grouped around three sides of a central quadrangle. The fourth side opens to a dramatic view of the Tocal Homestead and the Paterson valley.

In the main quadrangle the Chapel with its spire is the focal point of the College. The spire and the roof of the EA Hunt hall, with their robust bolted timber structures, integrate the buildings with the site. The prominence of the Chapel reflects the role played by religion in the establishment of the College. The repetition of the chapel's design features, such as exposed laminated concrete beams, in other areas of the campus serve to integrate the sacred and secular functions of the various buildings and to impart a sense of spirituality across the campus.

The landscape is one of scattered spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*) and other native trees and shrubs. Lawns are maintained but are not irrigated thereby reflecting the moods of the Australian landscape.

There is an extensive use of natural materials of timber, brick and tiles. The timbers used are from the area and include ironbark, brush box and tallow wood. Timberwork is exposed and includes large verandah post and roof beams. The campus features masonry pavers, which was highly innovative at the time of its construction when these materials were known only as 'electric bricks' and primarily buried on top of electrical cable. The campus brickwork is purposefully rough to indicate the rustic nature of the buildings. Rubble drains are used extensively in lieu of gutters. On the buildings where gutters were required copper has been used.

The vision for the buildings to age and merge with the landscape and mature with age has been achieved, and later additions have followed the spirit, intention and detail of the original concepts.

Chronology:

- 1963 College designed by Philip Cox and Ian McKay;
- 1964 Construction of the College commenced;
- 1965 The campus buildings won the Blacket and Sulman awards for architectural excellence;

- 1967 Student rooms 63 to 92 built;
- 1974/75 Construction of Glendarra block 1 and south western part of Crawford Court and Farm Machinery Demonstration Room;
- 1979 Swimming Pool constructed;
- 1987 Conversion of former machinery bay to offices and the creation of McFarlane Court. Completion of the north eastern elements of Crawford Court including substantial extensions to the Library and Computer Room;
- 1995 Construction of Glendarra 2 accommodation;
- 1996-97 Construction of the southern elements of McFarlane Court and extensions to far north eastern part of campus, North Court;
- 1998 Construction of Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority offices at Glendarra (the agency was then known as the Hunter Catchment Management Trust);
- 2010 extensions to dining room and kitchen; construction of residential supervisors' cottage; adaptive re-use of former staff cottages as group accommodation; refurbishment and modification of Glendarra 1 accommodation; adaptive re-use of a dairy shed as a ruminant field laboratory.

References

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