

REVIEW AND REGENERATION OF ANZAC PARADE, Canberra ACT

Brett Odgers 17 June 2024

In the wake of public debate over the extensions to the Australian War Memorial, it is time for review and regeneration of Anzac Parade. Indeed, Heritage Management Plans have recently (2022) been updated updated by the National Capital Authority (NCA) for Anzac Parade and the Parliament House Vista.

The Parade is a centrepiece and icon of the evolving National Capital and relevant to a spectrum of political, demographic, social and cultural changes in the rapidly growing city.

In this paper I discuss the history, values, functions and past reviews of Anzac Parade. I suggest the status quo of the Parade is no longer suitable for Canberra as a city and the nation's capital. It has great potential for a higher level of excellence in response to contemporary demands and opportunities.

National Capital Plan and National Heritage List

Anzac Parade is on the National Heritage List 'for cultural, aesthetic and ceremonial significance' and the Parliament House Vista is on the Commonwealth Heritage List as 'the central designed landscape of Canberra, expressing Walter Burley Griffin's design vision.' The National Capital Plan enshrines Griffin's winning plan and vision for the national capital, especially as a city in harmony with the landscape and symbolic of the natural environment, values, ideals, history and achievements of the nation.

The Australian War Memorial and the Memorial Parade/Anzac Parade are bracketed together on the National Heritage List with this inscription:

'Anzac Parade, as part of the Parliamentary Vista and as an extension of the Australian War Memorial, has a deep symbolism for many Australians, and has become part of one of the major cultural landscapes of Australia. The notion of a ceremonial space of this grandeur is not found elsewhere and Anzac Parade is nationally important for its public and commemorative functions.'

Professor Ken Taylor has written extensively about Canberra *the city in the landscape* along with the symbolism of Griffin's design and, in particular, eloquently about Anzac Parade as a 'landscape of memory':

'It is one of the great landscape axes of the world. The serendipitous outcome is that Griffin's Land Axis maintains its national symbolic status in a dual way. One as part of Griffin's ideal city, the other as national memory.' [1]

Sally Barnes, NCA Chief Executive says: 'The Australian War Memorial talks to Anzac Parade' [2] During an ABC Local Radio 666 interview on 24 November 2021, Sally Barnes also said 'Griffin envisaged the Land Axis north of the Lake should be for the people.'

Origins and reviews of Anzac Parade

At the direction of Griffin and Charles Weston, Griffin's Plaisance or Parkway was planted with trees and shrubs and walkways. The site for the Australian War Memorial was determined by the Federal Capital Advisory Committee in 1923. Griffin's *Prospect Parkway* was renamed *Anzac Park* in 1928 by the Canberra National Memorials Committee.

'New visions' for Anzac Parade were explored by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in the 1960s and for the 50th celebrations of Gallipoli in 1965 they reconstructed and renamed the 'processional way' Anzac Parade /Anzac Park. Clough and Harrison of NCDC replaced Weston's trees with Tasmanian Blue Gums and planter boxes of New Zealand shrubs.

A radical redesign of Anzac Parade was proposed in the early 1990s by the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA). [3] [An open competition yielded 'four finalist teams of highly experienced Australian architects, landscape architects and other designers.' The winning Daryl Jackson Architects' plan displayed intensive parklands whilst keeping the open Land Axis vista. Anzac Parade was assessed to be 'a place that needs to be engaged with directly – to walk, look and reflect.'

Paul Reid in his *Canberra Following Griffin* [4] writes 'the NCPA in 1990 designed a proposal to transform the parade ground into a commemorative garden ... with symbols of a national rather than militaristic nature.' There was 'no other identified program of functional needs. The vision remained on the drawing board.'

In September 1991 NCPA held a *Seminar on Landscape in the Central National Area* (with Reid, Jackson, Giurgola, Weirick, Johnson and Stretton) that led to the Central National Area Design Study 1994-95 report *Looking to the Future* (1994). [5]

Looking to the Future begins with 'Expanding the Vision', referring to Griffin's Land Axis as a 'symbol for the city in the landscape' with the Water Axis as a 'symbol for nature in the city.' The report concluded that 'Anzac Parade should continue as the nation's Spiritual Place, but not exclusively in a military sense. Areas of achievement such as the arts, culture, democracy and justice could also be celebrated here.' One of the finalists in the earlier Redesign competition proposed a 'Peace Square' and another a 'Place for Great Australians.' [6]

The 1991 Seminar discussed Daryl Jackson's winning design for Anzac Parade: he argued 'landscape alone cannot assume the burden of meaning and symbolism we expect of the National Capital.' He designed parterres, walks and garden beds on the 'undistinguished strip', imagery of the States in the federation and attractive parkland inviting 'people, concerts, meetings, gatherings, festivals.' [7]

There have been no more reviews or redesigns since 1990-91. The NCPA project looks like a missed opportunity.

In an ACT Heritage Week 2004 public talk, Graeme Trickett, former senior Heritage bureaucrat, called for Anzac Parade to be 'restored as a park with no more militarisation.' For some years observers have noted with concern diminution of Central Canberra parkland, whilst population and employment are increasing.

Original Griffin Plan

At the NCPA Seminar James Weirick highlighted Griffin's plan, the Prospect Parkway with Casino at the base of Mt Ainslie, a parkland *Plaisance* along the Land Axis derived from Frederick Law Olmsted Snr's Midway Plaisance in Chicago and the Casino, modelled on Frank Lloyd Wright's Midway Gardens, drawing people for relaxation, recreation, concerts and popular entertainment. Professor Weirick was not sure we need to continue the solemnity of the War Memorial throughout the Parade and regretted the 'desert-like emptiness and lack of people.' [8]

At the southern end of the Parkway between the Lake and Constitution Avenue

(the 'Municipal Axis') the Griffins famously depicted a stadium (recessed not to interrupt the Land Axis vista), four museums (including the arts), zoological gardens, Opera House, theatre, baths and gymnasia.

In his *Report Explanatory* of October 1913 Griffin places these local recreational, relaxation, cultural, arts, educational and sporting activities on and beside the Land Axis in 'public gardens a showplace of the city, a tributary to the homes of people, with maximum accessibility, culminating in the Casino.' He also envisaged 'commemorative monuments.' [9]

Griffin and Marion did not design a formal avenue or imagine a marching strip. They were indeed pacifists during their time in Australia. Photos of Charles Weston's garden layout of the parkway (probably at Griffin's direction) show a picturesque setting with tree plantings predominantly informal and a strong evergreen component, a series of spaces, and varied, aligned plantings in a lace-like pattern, but still keeping the open vista consistent with the remainder of the Land Axis through Parkes Place.



ABOVE: The Parkway planned by Griffin and planted with trees and gardens by Charles Weston, with the War Memorial, Mount Ainslie and the suburb of Reid to the left in the 1940s. Photograph courtesy Brett Odgers.

Like Griffin's *Capitol* concept for Capital Hill, the Prospect Parkway and Casino plans provide a wealth of alternative scenarios to the status quo of Anzac Parade. The Griffins' vision and the subsequent NCPA reviews provide inspiration and options to enhance the Parade.

Sacred site and other military monuments and memorials.

The military hegemony of Anzac Parade seems less suitable nowadays in the light of shifting notions about national identity, the militarisation of Australian history, patriotism, values, sentiments and symbols.

Professor Joan Beaumont has said 'dedicating Griffin's symbolic Land Axis to military service speaks volumes about the place of war in Australia's political culture and rhetoric. Few capital cities in the world have such prominent design.' [10] There are plenty of indicators of resistance to more military memorials in favour of more diverse and representative objects of national commemoration and achievement. Jack Waterford contributed notable opinion pieces to the Canberra Times on 'Enough War Memorials' and 'Time to pull the curtain on the memorial industry.' [11]

Stakeholders and users of Anzac Parade

The Parade is not regularly used for commemorative purposes. There are only two annual ceremonial days: Anzac and Remembrance. The crunch of marching boots is rarer still as marching bands have been banned in favour of broadcast marching music for the Veterans' March on Anzac Day. On Anzac Day all the marchers and amenities take up only half of the Parade. The Parade hosts low usage and rare joint programs with the AWM.

Anzac Parade's main functions are vehicle traffic, vistas, conservation of the Land Axis and setting of the War Memorial, memorials of battles and military service, open space, tourism and occasional commemorative purposes. It continues to serve an overarching political function, used by politicians in particular to capitalise on Anzac and the armed services, increasingly seen as a lop-sided view of national identity and history.

A proposed Silent Vigil by the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, supported by Medical Association for the Prevention of War (Nobel Prize winners), Quakers and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – to mark Remembrance Day on 11 November - was refused permission by the NCA in October 2018. A spokeswoman for the NCA told the media that 'Anzac Parade had been reserved exclusively by the war memorial.' The AWM denied any part in the NCA's decision. [12]

Accessibility is non-existent as the strip is virtually bare and the roads carry a lot of dangerous traffic. The Parade is not inviting to people, except for the war memorials and then selectively. A Canberra Times correspondent wrote 'It's scary. Every time I cross it, I expect to be mown down by a whiff of grapeshot.' [13]

Spaces are reserved for more memorials whilst public opposition to more memorials is becoming insistent. The distinction between 'necessary' and 'chosen' wars could limit the field. The spirit of the nation, the achievements, identity, values and global status are recognised increasingly without reliance on military service, battles and ANZAC.

During the war memorials controversy of 2007-2012 the NCA went along with the conventional military devotion by supporting strongly the proposal for huge and expansive World Wars I and II memorials on the Lake foreshore Rond Terraces, over the road in line with Anzac Parade, until forced to abandon the project in face of intensive Canberra community and Australian War Memorial Council disapproval. By this time, the NCA had become opposed also. [14]

Parade Stakeholders include future generations. The latter are already rapidly arriving as residents along Constitution Avenue, in Section 5 Campbell and prospective redevelopment in Reid. Parklands and open space are diminishing in the city and inner north suburbs. The location and nature of 'the processional way' is incongruous in this rapidly developing scenario, which is more or less the residential density, areas and amenities envisaged by Griffin. The NCA seems more concerned with 'screening' such housing, than restoring or creating valuable parkland and amenity for a burgeoning population.

One notable citizen is Chris Latham. As Director of the Canberra International Music Festival for some years but especially in Centenary Year 2013, he employed with great effect the Griffins, the geometry and symbolism of their Plan, for the themes, graphics and 'key nexus points' for the concerts.

As Musical Artist in Residence at the War Memorial, Chris produced the *Gallipoli Symphony* (2015) and *The Diggers' Requiem* (2018), both collaborations by various Australian composers. In a paper *Revisiting the Griffins' Vision* (2013), part of fundraising for performances of the Symphony and Requiem, (2013) he juxtaposed the War Memorial with an 'arts precinct' reviving Griffin's vision and plan for the arts, music and theatre in the Anzac Parade, to 'enable catharsis and healing, and to empower the movement towards a lasting peace in the world.' He incorporated Griffin's intentions in *The Diggers' Requiem*. Chris has presented his thesis at a number of talks around Canberra and the media. [15]

Landscape values, aesthetics and symbolism

The NCA's Heritage Management Plans incorporate abundant data on the existing purposes and uses of the Parade but do not differentiate between the gravel parade ground and the actual memorials spaced along the adjoining Anzac Park tree-lined streets, which define the 200m. wide and 1.5 km long original Griffin Land Axis Prospect Park. The data is also limited by positive questionnaires rather than negative assessments, such as criticisms of lengthy unrelieved emptiness, traffic hazards, inaccessibility, bare of any features and amenities other than war memorials, crushed red house bricks and an exclusive, rarely used parade ground.



ABOVE: Looking south along the 1.5km length of the unrelieved austere Anzac Parade. Photographed by Luke Wensing, 2020.

There is a parallel with the Black Mountain Tower. The NCDC was overruled by the Postmaster General in 1974 and so suffered a big, unnecessary, nondescript, conventional structure on a prominent and beautiful inner-city mountain, which distracts attention from and distorts the geometric, symbolic aesthetic layout of the planned National Capital.

There is a high level of recognition of both the Tower and Anzac Parade as Canberra's signature icons. It is difficult to find data on the aesthetic character of either. It is of interest that a recent public debate in *The Canberra Times* attracted a significant

number of letter-writers in favour of demolishing the Tower, instead of a proposed renovation. [16]

Neither has aesthetic qualities or serves the nation or Canberra very well as an icon. The ACT Heritage Places Register notes that 'a ceremonial space of the Parade's grandeur is not found elsewhere in Australia.' Yet each could be improved by major alterations in response to demographic and social changes.

The long, red gravel parade strip is incongruous and ugly, a distraction compared with the alternatives conceived by Griffin, Weston and the NCPA expert reviews in the early 1990s of public walkways, native flora, gardens and parkland, which can convey the symbolism of the Australian natural environment, ethos and identity, the Land Axis and The Parliament House Vista.

It is a vast area and presents great potential for development as impressive landscape providing parkland, gardens, walkways, accessibility, relaxation and recreation, culture and the arts and to enhance the Land Axis with its national symbolism.

Anzac Parade is a central element of the *Marion Mahony Griffin View* from Mt Ainslie. This vista has already been disrupted by the demolition of Anzac Park East, which formerly anchored the Parade together with the other portal Anzac Park West. The clear lines of Anzac Parade lead the viewer to Lake Burley Griffin, across to Old Parliament House and Parliament House. This feature is a most significant acknowledgement of Marion's part in the design of the capital.

Aldo Giurgola and Ken Taylor have both drawn attention to the potential of the Parade to convey the elements of the Australian bush and wildlife. Scientifically, it is an urban wildlife corridor. Anzac Parade is presently 'replete with symbols', but has also great potential for non-military features and non-military purposes and events. [17]

It would not be difficult to redesign, relandscape and regenerate Anzac Parade whilst retaining a marching parade. Anzac Parade is 1.5 ks in length and 200 m wide . The northern intersecting side streets – Blamey Crescent, Currong Street/Geerilong Gardens and East and West Anzac Parks allow ample space for marching groups to form up and into the Anzac Day march as it is underway. The impending rebuild of the approach and forecourt of the AWM enlarges these options. The commemorative memorials would be unaffected and given improved settings, access and safety.

Responsibility, approvals and accountability

The Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories (PJSCNCET) is the main agency whereby Commonwealth Parliament exercises control and accountability of the NCA for Canberra's development as the National Capital.

The statutory Canberra National Memorials Committee (CNMC) approves the location and character of new memorials, how they address the Capital's national memorial landscape and, through the NCA, maintains and enhances public commemorative sites, monuments and memorials. There is a strong case for both the PJSCNCET and the CNMC to examine Anzac Parade, especially in the context of the AWM's expansion.

The Parade and its environs have a fascinating and stimulating history and prospects. During the various *Griffins' Canberra* tours conducted by the Walter Burley Griffin Society, the Griffins' vision for Anzac Parade never fails to register interest and delight with tourists and Society members alike.

Anzac Parade warrants a review of its heritage values and potential for regeneration beyond status quo updates of Heritage Management Plans. With the increasing population and density of Canberra, high expectations for its role as the national capital and heritage conservation of Griffin's Land Axis, there are opportunities to diversify and enhance the uses of this national land.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Canberra Chapter submitted this proposal dated 11 May 2021 to the NCA in public consultations April-May 2021 on *Anzac Parade – Heritage Management Plan* (September 2020 Consultants Draft). The revised Heritage Management Plan, approved by the NCA Board, was published dated September 2022.

At their invitation, Brett Odgers, on behalf of the WBGS, met with Ms Sally Barnes, Chief Executive, and senior planning and heritage officers of the NCA, on 21 December 2023 to discuss the proposal, including 'making it more of a green space and pedestrian walkway and garden'. Potential options and reshaping of the Parade were discussed.

Mr Odgers was notified by NCA 16 January 2024 that 'the HMP does not propose changes to Anzac Parade that would adversely affect the listed heritage values. There are currently no plans to commence a review of the heritage values under the EPBC Act.

Alternative futures

It appears that the NCA is not consulting with the ACT Government planning agencies by averting their gaze from the rapid residential development, losses of open space, recreational amenities and parkland and prospective tourism growth in the Anzac Parade precinct. The report *A Capital for All Australians into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital* by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee (May 2024) coinciding with the NCA's approval of the expansion of the Australian War Memorial, presages ever greater tourism and visits to the AWM.

The NCA appears also not to have assessed the aesthetic impacts of the brutal, controversial reconfiguration of the new AWM South Entrance front wall and commemorative Parade Ground looking down on, and accentuated by, an unrelieved austere Anzac Parade strip and six-lane avenue. How immeasurably enhanced could the latter be if converted to recreational parkland? At the same time, the ACT planning authorities should be alert to the demographic and land use imperatives. It is a project which should command the best collaborative efforts of the NCA, Commonwealth agencies and the ACT Government.

Brett Odgers 17 June 2024

Endnotes

- [1] Ken Taylor, 'Our cultural landscapes,' *Heritage in Trust* (National Trust ACT), Spring 1999, pp 3-4
- [2] Sally Barnes, Evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the ACT and Territories, Hansard 8 October 2020
- [3] National Capital Planning Authority, *Looking to the Future: Central National Area Design Study*, Canberra 1995
- [4] NCPA, *Looking to the Future*, Ibid.
- [5] Paul Reid, *Canberra Following Griffin*, National Archives of Australia 2002, pp 328-329

- [6] National Capital Planning Authority, *Landscape in the Central National Area: Seminar Proceedings*, 12-13 September 1991, Canberra
- [7] NCPA, *Looking to the Future*, Ibid.
- [8] Ibid., James Weirick
- [9] WB Griffin, Preliminary General Plan October 1913, in Dustin Griffin, *The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin*, Cambridge University Press 2008 p.46
- [10] Joan Beaumont, quoted by Sophie Verass in *The Story behind Canberra's Anzac Parade*, The Canberra Times 25.4.2018
- [11] J. Waterford, The Canberra Times 3.11.2018 and 12.12.2018
- [12] Medical Association for the Prevention of War mapw.org.au/news and Dr Janet Salisbury letter to editor, The Canberra Times 13.10.18
- [13] David Walker, letter to editor, The Canberra Times 20.2.2011
- [14] Lake War Memorials Forum 2012
- [15] Chris Latham, *Memory, Healing and the Arts in the Griffins' Vision: revisiting their vision a century after the Great War*, Ainslie Arts Centre, Canberra, November 2019
- [16] Letters to editor, The Canberra Times by Ann Kent, Tony Slatyer and others, January 2022
- [17] Ken Taylor, *Anzac Parade – a Landscape of Memory*, Canberra Historical Journal No. 38 September 1996 pages 3-12.