

EUROPEAN HERITAGE

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1.0 Historical Overview

Introduction

Airds is a public housing estate located on the eastern fringe of the Campbelltown Local Government Area, approximately 4km south east of the Campbelltown CBD and is adjoined by the suburbs of Ruse to the north, Bradbury to the west and the Georges River Corridor to the east.

The following discussion of the history and development of the area has been broken up into three subheadings;

- 1.1 The Study Site Prior to 1970
- 1.2 The Satellite City and the Role of the Housing Commission of NSW 1973-76
- 1.3 The Development of Airds 1976 to the Present

1.1 The Study Site Prior to 1970

Within the first twenty years of Sydney's settlement the area of Campbelltown had been established. The Cumberland Plain serviced the new colony of New South Wales and by 1821, had been divided into principal districts extending north to the Hawkesbury River, west to the Nepean River and south to the Appin District. The districts of 'Airds', 'Upper Minto', 'Minto' and 'Appin' are now collectively known as Campbelltown. The study area which is today the suburb of Airds, was named after the principal district in which it was contained. Governor Macquarie named the district in honour of his wife's family estate in Scotland and the township of Campbelltown after his wife's maiden name. Campbelltown was established as Airds' main town centre and was intentionally positioned to the centre of the district.¹

In 1811 the first land was granted in the Airds district, in the Parish of St. Peter and the County of Cumberland and from as early as 1816 in the south-western portions of the study area. The first grantee, William Skinner, was granted his land on the 8 October 1816 however it would be almost three years before the second and third grantees, Francis Kenny and William Craft would be granted their portions (17 August 1819). Land at the northern end of the study site was divided into comparatively smaller allotments and were granted to James Kenny (30 June 1823); Isaac Douce (30 June 1823); John Docharty (19 October 1831); and Samuel Lovelee (26 August 1834). It would be some seventy six years before the eastern portions of land adjacent to the Georges River Corridor would be sectioned and granted per Torrens Title to Mark Longhurst (2 December 1910); Adolphus Samuel Key (2 December 1913); and John Hagan (2 December 1918).

Airds consisted of bushland and small cattle farms for most of its early life. It is possible that some properties also farmed sheep as was common in the Campbelltown districts. The 'Woolwash Reserve' in Airds (one of Campbelltown's older bushland parks) is believed to have got its name because it was where the local wool clip was scoured to lighten it on its overland journey to the Sydney market. The reserve was a popular recreation area and many Campbelltown residents regularly used the park before the surrounding area's development during the 1970s.² A road system was established during the c.1920s and comprised of Riverside Road, Briar Road, Greengate Road and a 'no through road', Deans Road, to the north off Georges River Road. From the 1960s the study area was known as either South Campbelltown (southern portions) or Kentlyn (northern portions). The area remained largely

unchanged into the 1970s, the landscape characterised by a combination of small farms (cattle, grain, poultry, dairy) cottages, outbuildings and bushland. Just prior to the NSW Housing Commission development, the study area contained sixty one buildings however a significant number of these structures were outbuildings.

1.2 The Satellite City and the Role of the Housing Commission of NSW 1973-76

From as early as the 1950s the Campbelltown region was recognised as a growth area and one that could possibly sustain large development. In 1951, the County of Cumberland Planning Scheme proposed that Campbelltown become a satellite town for approximately 30 000 people beyond the 'green belt' surrounding metropolitan Sydney. The Scheme was believed to be a key element in meeting Sydney's growth needs and included an urban release programme. One problem however was that the 30 000 estimate had been calculated on the assumption that the metropolitan population would only reach 2.3 million in 1980 and stabilize or decline. By 1961 however, the population of Campbelltown had already grown to around 18 000 people, a reflection of the rapid growth within urban Sydney.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was not until the mid 1960s, with the establishment of the State Planning Authority, that a decision was made to suspend the County of Cumberland Planning Scheme to allow for the further expansion of Campbelltown. The authority claimed the Campbelltown region could cater for approximately 40-50 000 people. Shortly after, the Minister for Local Government requested the authority to conduct a feasibility study for the provision of a much larger town population of up to 150 000 to 200 000 people. As a result of these investigations, the Authority reported to the Minister that a satellite city of this nature was in fact feasible. In 1973 the Authority released the Structure Plan for the new cities of Campbelltown, Camden and Appin, with the three combining to accommodate half a million people by the year 2000. The plan provided for the capacity of 230 000 people in the City of Campbelltown, 100 000 people in the City of Camden and 170 000 people in the City of Appin.^{iv}

The population targets outlined in the State Planning Authority's Structure Plan meant the population of Campbelltown alone was forecast to increase by almost 150% in five years, between 1971 and 1976.^v One way in which this rapid short-term population growth could be achieved was with the assistance of public housing. The Housing Commission programme had already been planned in 1970, three years prior to the release of the Authority's published Structure Plan. The 1970-71 Annual Report of the Housing Commission discussed the importance of their programme;

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Commission's contribution, by way of the provision of large numbers of houses, will be vital to the success of the scheme, particularly in the early years. The population required to provide the impetus for growth in Campbelltown can only come through a large scale co-ordinated housing programme and at this stage this can only be achieved through the activities of the Commission.^{vi}

The Structure Plan of 1973 clearly stated;

Of those moving to the New Cities in the early years, a quarter or more will probably be attracted by Housing Commission accommodation. They are likely to be similar to those in Housing Commission developments such as at Mt. Druitt, where families are generally large, the average size being over 4 persons. Over 70% of the children are under 7 years of age. Car ownership rates are low.^{vii}

The State Planning Authority recognised that in order to house another 51 000 people in Campbelltown and Camden in only four years, a massive building plan would be necessary to provide the estimated 3 500 new dwellings required per year. The Housing Commission programme would 'contribute 1000 dwellings a year', around one third of the total housing. As at the end of 1972, the overall residential density in Campbelltown City was around thirty five persons per hectare, a figure considered low density. The New Cities plans however assumed a gross living area density of 50 persons per hectare 'which will allow for the majority of development to be at detached housing densities but with medium density housing built in selected areas.'^{viii}

The Authority believed a combination of incentives would attract the increased population, one of which was growth generating employment opportunities. The new jobs would be found in the 'city-building' industries such as building and construction, the 'city-serving' industries such as retailing, transport and education, the manufacturing industries and finally tertiary industry and office employment. The Housing Commission of New South Wales (NSW) realised unemployed Housing Commission tenants would have a greater chance of re-entering the workforce within their local areas and into more suitable jobs due to the increased choice and flexibility created by the demand for employees. Travelling into Sydney for work would not be necessary for the new residents of Campbelltown. Furthermore, these tenants would facilitate an instant growth generating workforce within the New City, which of course would be vital in gauging the Scheme's short-term and long-term success.^{ix}

In 1971 The Housing Commission of NSW fulfilled their responsibilities by designating four sites for major estate development in consultation with the State Planning Authority – Macquarie Fields, Minto, Kentlyn (later renamed Airds) and West Campbelltown. The Macquarie Fields and Minto projects were the first two to be completed. The planning proposals for the Kentlyn project were not completed until 1973, however detailed plans for a new high school in Briar Road were announced in June 1972. By 1974 both the Airds High School and Briar Road Public School were in operation, originally drawing their students from neighbouring Bradbury. The Mary Reiby School opened in 1973 as an institution for delinquent girls.^x

Approval was given by the Commission in 1974 to compulsory acquire land for the development of Kentlyn with the majority of acquisitions made during 1975 and 1976. Most of the existing houses, farm cottages and outbuildings were subsequently demolished, however seven owners attained permission to keep their houses provided they agreed to the sale of land. The area of the Kentlyn site encompassed 108 hectares of land. The new road system designed in 1975 featured main road names that already existed however the roads were restructured and now follow vastly different paths. Other street names were based on a wool industry theme because of the close proximity of the suburb to the Woolwash Reserve. Large-scale construction commenced during 1976 and later that year the suburb's name was changed from Kentlyn to Airds.^{xi}

1.3 The Development of Airds 1976 to the Present

The design of Airds, as with other neighbouring public housing estates, was based on 'Radburn' design principles. The Radburn town design was pioneered by Clarence Stein and Henry Wight in 1928 and was intended to be the model town for the upper middle class during the burgeoning motor age in North America. The key characteristics of the Radburn design include the separation of pedestrian paths and vehicular streets which are in the form of cul-de-sacs; open public spaces connected by walkways and located in the interiors of large blocks; back to front housing facing internal open space with backdoors facing the street; and super lots to prevent subdivision and individual title. At the time of construction, the

Campbelltown estates were viewed as progressive in terms of town planning principles, with some locations receiving architectural design awards.^{xii}

Although a large number of detached cottages were constructed in Airds, medium density housing outnumbered other design forms and was chosen in an attempt to house more people per hectare. In 1996, the density of Airds had reached 56.5 persons per hectare. Medium density was also one way in which the Housing Commission of NSW could combat the problem of rising land prices around the Sydney area. The 'Progressive Planning' principles of Radburn were particularly suited to medium density housing, enabling a 'park like quality to be achieved' where open spaces can become communal areas and residents can feel part of a community because of the integrated grouping of houses. Of the 108 hectares of land forming Airds, twenty one hectares of land was designated public open space. Conventional planning used by the Housing Commission of NSW prior to the implementation of Radburn was in the form of detached cottages that were all individually designed, 'with no thought given to the final appearance of the streetscape'. During the 1970s it was thought that generic housing designs were more attractive, and designs that resulted in individual identities were not important to housing commission tenants and therefore unnecessary.^{xiii}

The largest and most concentrated development within Airds occurred within the first two years of the site's development. In 1976, the first year of construction, a total of 587 dwellings were completed, a further 392 dwellings were completed in 1977 whilst another 131 were finished during 1978. With two years of intense development came a large influx of people to the area. In 1976 between January and June, the completion of 193 dwellings attracted some 904 people to Airds. The building programme that was planned for the suburb meant that the population of Airds was planned to continually rise until the optimum population of 6000 people was reached by approximately 1983. Even after 1983, the Housing Commission of NSW envisioned a slow though continual rise in the suburb's population throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. The building programme however dropped off, slowing to a halt in 1979 with no completed projects whatsoever, beginning again in 1980 with sixty six dwellings finished, twenty six in 1981 and scattered development completed thereafter.^{xiv}

The building programme implemented by the Housing Commission of NSW for Airds (and other suburbs) was abandoned once it became obvious that the projected population and economic growth rates projected by the former State Planning Authority for the Macarthur region would not eventuate. The withdrawal of Commonwealth funding and doubt about the establishment of the final sector are the main reasons for the failure of the Satellite City. This caused great problems, especially for Housing Commission residents relocated to the Campbelltown estates that by 1982, made up almost 40% of the entire Campbelltown population. This extensive welfare housing programme still resulted in rapid growth, higher than any other urban area in Australia. However, those who were already socially disadvantaged were further disadvantaged by being located on Sydney's fringe with inadequate employment, poor transport systems and undeveloped social infrastructure.^{xv} Over time, due to social problems resulting from inappropriate Radburn design, isolation and lack of services, there became a reluctance to accept housing allocations in Airds by people on the Department's waiting lists. This resulted in only the most desperate individuals and families being housed in one concentrated area.^{xvi}

Amenities that should have perhaps been constructed as part of the original neighbourhood plan or constructed prior to relocating people to the area (such as Briar Road Public School and Airds High School) were not built until some years later. The Airds Village Shopping Centre, recognised as of primary importance for local residents, was constructed during 1978 with residents using a temporary grocery store prior to its construction. The Airds Community Centre/Recreation Centre was built in 1979. Both the Airds Swimming Pool and

Airds Hotel, viewed with less urgency, were built in 1982 and 1980 respectively. One surprise late addition to the suburb, especially considering the population demography has always been dominated by young adults, teenagers and children, is the Youth Centre. The permanent Youth Centre was not constructed until 1987, when social problems were already a reality. During the 1990s, these facilities were providing a poor level of service, were generally under-funded and ill equipped to deal with the needs of such a disadvantaged community. These problems and others, particularly those associated with Radburn design (for example poorly lit pedestrian walkways hidden from the road) are now being rectified. Finalised in early 1997, The Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (NIP) is an ongoing project aimed at redesigning the suburb and includes general renewal components.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ *Campbelltown Heritage Study: Built Environment*, June 1994 p7
- ⁱⁱ McGill, J., Fowler, V., & Richardson, K., *Campbelltown's Streets & Suburbs: How and Why They Got Their Name*, Campbelltown & Airds Historical Society 1995 p27
- ⁱⁱⁱ Leary, John K, *A Century of Progress 1882-1982: Campbelltown A City on the Move*, Campbelltown City Council, 1982 p30
- ^{iv} *The New Cities of Campbelltown, Camden and Appin: Structure Plan*, State Planning Authority of NSW, 1973 p10
- ^v *Ibid* p52
- ^{vi} The Housing Commission of NSW, *Annual Report 1971-72*, p2
- ^{vii} State Planning Authority, *op.cit*, p52
- ^{viii} *ibid*, p58
- ^{ix} *ibid*, p54
- ^x McGill, Fowler & Richardson, *op.cit*, p27
- ^{xi} *ibid*
- ^{xii} *Airds Neighbourhood Development Plan, Final Report*, Prepared by Hassell Sept 1997 p2
- ^{xiii} Housing Commission of NSW, *Medium Density Housing: Campbelltown Area* 1974
- ^{xiv} The Housing Commission of NSW, *Annual Reports*, 1975-1985
- ^{xv} Leary, John K, *op.cit*, pp43-45
- ^{xvi} *Social Cost Benefit Analysis of NSW Department of Housing's Neighbourhood Improvement Programme. Case Study Area: Airds*. March 1996 p6

2.0 Identification of European Heritage Items

Extensive research and fieldwork shows that no potential sites or items of European Heritage Significance exist within the Airds Town Centre study area. Briar Cottage, located at No. 16 Waterhouse Place, Airds is however an item of European heritage significance, and is worth noting due to its close proximity to the study area. The structure is an Edwardian tuck-pointed brick house with a hipped Marseilles tile roof and terra cotta roof ridging. Briar Cottage is listed both on the Local Environmental Plan (LEP) of Campbelltown City Council and the Jubilee Register of The National Trust as an item of Heritage Significance.