

**BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY
25 COLLEGE ROAD, KENT TOWN SA 5067**

Discussion of Heritage Significance



Bureau of Meteorology Building – Southern Elevation

Overview of Building and Garden Design

The building and garden were featured in *Building and Architecture* in 1977. At that time it was described as a three-storey building of L-shaped plan form on a sloping site with 'functional sculptural and spatial elements visible both externally and internally.' The ground floor contained service facilities and provided direct vehicular access; level 2 was primarily administrative functions, and level 3 housed the Bureau's technical activities. Level 2 and main entrance is accessible from College Rd via a 25m free-standing elevated walkway. Key elements/features of the design included a number of cylindrical shafts that accommodate stairways, services and meteorological functions; extensive glazing to facilitate sky observation; the glazed hood over the entrance foyer; and, external aluminium cladding.

The garden was created on a slope in the angle between the building's wings. The slope was informally terraced to create an expansive rockery with a reflecting pool and small waterfall and was planted primarily with Australian native plants. *Building and Architecture* notes the intent for a time capsule containing late twentieth century artefacts to be buried in one of the

mounds in the garden. It is unclear if the time capsule was buried on site or if one was ever unearthed.

Past Consideration in Heritage surveys

In the past, two heritage surveys have considered the potential heritage qualities of buildings located in Kent Town. The first is the *Heritage Survey of Kensington and Norwood* (1985) and was prepared by Heritage Investigations. The other survey *Kensington and Norwood Heritage Review* was prepared a decade later by Mark Butcher Architects. The Bureau of Meteorology building was mentioned in the first survey but no heritage values were identified for it. The later survey did not mention the Bureau building.

Heritage Significance of Bureau of Meteorology Building and Garden

The potential significance of the Bureau of Meteorology Building and Garden are considered under each criteria in turn:

(a) It demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history

The historical associations proposed by the nominator relate specifically to the emergence of the building's style in the United Kingdom and its adaptation to Australia and South Australia. The nominator suggests that the building's style is 'Brutalist/high-tech, clearly expressing its scientific functions'.

Only a very limited number of buildings that could be described as good examples of the late modern high-tech style were built in South Australia during the latter decades of the twentieth century. The emergence and application of a new architectural style in South Australia is of historical importance, however, given the limited number of high-quality buildings constructed in the style, it does not demonstrate significant aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history.

The building was constructed as the new headquarters for the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology with the aim of housing the Bureau's various functions and personnel in a single location. The Bureau of Meteorology was formed in 1907. However, colonial meteorologists devised uniform codes, observation practices and standards from the 1880s and were effectively working collaboratively from that time. Given that the building and garden were built by the Commonwealth government for a federal bureau, its historical associations are more closely associated with National than State heritage values.

It is unlikely that the building and garden could be considered to meet criterion (a).

(b) It has rare, uncommon or endangered qualities that are of cultural significance

Meeting Date: 05 July 2018

Prepared by: Heritage South Australia

The building is a rare example of a late modern high-tech building, however, given the limited use of the style in South Australia it is not of cultural significance to the State.

It is unlikely that the building and garden meets criterion (b).

(c) It may yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the State's history, including its natural history

It is very unlikely that there is anything currently not visible on site that would contribute meaningfully to the State's history that cannot be yielded through other sources.

It is unlikely that the building and garden meets criterion (c).

(d) It is an outstanding representative of a particular class of place of cultural significance

There are three potential classes of place that the building represents, including: Bureau of Meteorology buildings, research facilities; and, late modern architecture in South Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology has had buildings at a number of sites in South Australia since its formation in 1907. However, as a class of place it is very small and as a Commonwealth facility is associated more with National rather than State heritage values.

There are many research facilities in South Australia including those located at the three universities and commercial establishments. These buildings also mix service, office and research spaces and it is unlikely that the Bureau of Meteorology building is an 'outstanding' example.

Only minimal research or comparative analysis has been conducted on South Australia's late modern architecture. The building is a good example of late modern high-tech architecture and it is possible that it may be an outstanding example, however, it is unlikely that late modern high-tech architecture can be considered to be a class of place of cultural significance in South Australia.

It is unlikely that the building and garden meets criterion (d).

(e) It demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics

The building is a good example of a late modern high-tech building – it is not Brutalist in design as proposed by the nominator. The form of the building is sculptural with general internal functions reflected in the articulation of mass, and is dressed with new high-tech materials including aluminium cladding and glass. Horizontal elements reflect the function and scale of

the place. Features like the 'bubble' alludes to space-age imagery. The building has aesthetic merit as an exemplar of late modern high-tech architecture in South Australia. It is an early example of the style and one of few remaining examples built in the 1970s and 1980s. However, there is sufficient 'disconnect' between the courtyard or northern elevation and the other three elevations to potentially compromise its ability to clearly illustrate the stylistic representation.

The building was not nominated for an architectural award and therefore has no formal acknowledgement from the architectural fraternity for its architectural merits. During the late 1990s the South Australia Division of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects undertook a survey of 20th century architecture. The survey reviewed 400 20th Century places in South Australia and chose 100 to represent the best architecture of their period for the time. The Bureau of Meteorology was chosen as one of the top 100 as 'a fine example of the modern/functionalist style of architecture prevalent before Post Modernism' became more popular with South Australian architects. The survey identified that the Bureau was one of the earliest exemplars of its style, and noted that the 'quality of design and integrity (of the building) is of a high standard'.

Only a limited comparative analysis of late modern high-tech buildings has been undertaken. Other examples were constructed on Greenhill Road in the 1980s but most have been re-clad or demolished. Buildings with space frames include the Unley Town Hall, Bicentenary Conservatory (current State Heritage Place) and the Telstra building on Pirie Street. Examples of brutalist buildings in South Australia include the Forensic Science building, Australian Mineral Foundation, Regency Park (TAFE – has been altered), and the former Motor Registration building.

The basic structure of the garden appears to remain intact, however, without further investigation it is unclear if sufficient integrity remains for it to be considered to have State heritage qualities.

The building may meet criterion (e).

(f) It has a strong cultural or spiritual associations for the community or a group within it

The group with the strongest associations with the building and garden are Bureau of Meteorology staff. There is no evidence to suggest that past and current Bureau staff have a strong cultural or spiritual connection with the building.

It is unlikely that the building and garden meets criterion (f)

(g) it has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance

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The building may have a special association with the Bureau of Meteorology as an organisation, and/or with architect Jim Ward. The Bureau of Meteorology is a Commonwealth government organisation which could be said to reflect National rather than State heritage values. Jim Ward designed the building while an employee of a Commonwealth department. He is not widely known in South Australia and is not a person of historical importance to South Australia.

The garden was designed by Ian Barwick and Associates and was recognised by the landscape architectural fraternity for the quality of its design. However, the lack of clarity around the integrity of the garden means that it may not be the best representation of Barwick's work.

It is unlikely that the building and garden meets criterion (g)

REFERENCES

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