



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 4.1.2 Making suburbs
- 7.5.9 Providing services and welfare

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 404 Community services and utilities
- 108 Government Policy
- 112 Technology and technological change

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Wandana Apartment Block, with its considered massing and limited palette of materials is a good example of the Post-War International style of architecture. The lawns and gardens, designed to complement the building, add to the aesthetic quality of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

As the first multi-storey residential building providing public housing in Perth, and one of the first in Australia, the place demonstrates design innovation and achievement. (Criterion 1.2)

The physical dominance of the ten storey building in the complex over the surrounding single storey residential buildings gives it a landmark quality.. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Wandana Apartment Block is associated with the debate concerning the provision of appropriate public housing in cities and the question of high rise accommodation that was prevalent in western countries in the post-World War II period and which involved architects, planners and sociologists. (Criterion 2.1)

The place is important as an attempt to provide low cost public housing for a range of household types close to the city centre at a time of rapid population growth. (Criterion 2.2)

The place has significance as the first multi-storey public housing apartment block in the State. The lawns, gardens, playgrounds, shops and community

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

facilities established at the time of construction were designed to provide amenities and services for residents. (Criterion 2.2)

Wandana Apartment Block was constructed as a result of the vision of Herb Graham, the Minister for Housing at the time. Graham was responsible for implementing the new concepts of public housing in Western Australia in the 1950s. (Criteria 2.2 & 2.3)

Wandana Apartment Block was designed by Perth architect Harold Krantz, who was prominent in the field of flat design in Perth and who promoted the principles of standardisation and economies of scale in construction. The landscaping was designed by prominent landscape architect, John Oldham (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The place is valued for its association with the provision of public housing. Specifically it was an example of the experiment in multi storey housing that caused much controversy and discussion on the nature of housing in Australia and elsewhere in the 1950s and 60s.. (Criterion 4.1)

The place is valued by the various residents who have lived in the neighbourly community of the multi storey public apartment since its construction in 1954. (Criterion 4.1)

The dominance of *Wandana Apartment Block* in the Subiaco community and its continuity of function contribute to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Wandana Apartment Block was the first multi-storey public housing block built in the Western Australia and as such represents the State Government's adoption of the post-World War II social planning philosophies already being implemented in Europe and America at the time. In a national context, high rise public housing did not occur in Melbourne until the 1960s and *Wandana* is therefore possibly one of the earliest examples in Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Wandana Apartment Block is representative of a number of multi-storey residential buildings constructed to provide public housing in the post-World War II era, both in Australia and other Western countries. (Criterion 5.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Wandana Apartment Block is in fair condition. The ten-storey, block, however, has fretting brickwork and the concrete balconies are showing signs of deterioration.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The integrity of *Wandana Apartment Block* is high. The original intention, that of public housing, is intact.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of *Wandana Apartment Block* is high. The fabric is close to its original state.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Prue Griffin, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Wandana Apartment Block is a complex of three apartment blocks, one ten storey block and two three storey blocks. The buildings were designed in 1953 by the architectural firm of Krantz and Sheldon for the State Housing Commission of Western Australia. Builders A. T. Brine and Son Pty. Ltd. completed construction in 1956 and the complex was officially opened on 15 March 1956 by the Minister for Housing, Mr. Herb Graham.¹

In the early 1950s, land in Subiaco was resumed for commercial ventures and multiple storey flats were being built at the expense of many of the suburb's older homes.² Although there was some council disagreement about the desirability of a ten storey apartment block, the council gave its approval quite readily.³

The land for *Wandana Apartment Block* was issued to the State Housing Commission in 1953, as a Crown Grant, having been purchased from a number of private individuals.⁴ It is noted in the City of Subiaco Municipal Inventory that '(t)hese new buildings were ... located on lots where the former residents had sold their homes to move into a retirement village'.⁵

The State Government announced in August 1953 that the land was to be used as the site for 242 flats 'to provide homes for people who need them close to Perth'.⁶ Since the end of World War Two, there had been a severe shortage of housing in Perth. Due to the increased birth rate following the War and the influx of migrants from overseas and interstate, there was insufficient accommodation in Perth. In 1953, the Commission stated they had more than 11,000 applications for homes, some dating from 1948.⁷

The advantages of the project, as seen by the Chairman of the State Housing Commission, Mr. R W. Brownlie, were outlined in *The West Australian*:

Water, electricity and gas are already there and first-class roads bound the property,

'It is an ideal site for flats because it is just across the road from the wide, airy spaces of King's Park.

'I realise that there is always some antipathy to flat life, but you cannot keep on going farther out from the centre of the city all the time,' he added.

¹ *The West Australian*, 16 March 1956, p. 10.

² Municipal Heritage Inventory, City of Subiaco, prepared by Hocking Planning and Architecture, January, 1995, p. 27.

³ *The West Australian*, 11 February 1954, in Battye Library, Acc 3456A, MN 1156.

⁴ Crown Grant, Volume 1179 Folio 369, Department of Land Administration.

⁵ Municipal Heritage Inventory, p. 27.

⁶ *The West Australian*, 31 August 1953, p. 5.

⁷ *ibid.*

'This project will be the answer to those who need homes quickly and need them close to the city,'⁸

The commission was aware that there would be some negative responses to the proposal. The reaction was swift in coming, an editorial in *The West Australian* attacked the proposal. It was agreed that the location was excellent and the motivation of reducing the housing shortage, admirable but the scale of the project was abhorrent:

'if the Government proposed to build 42 flats at Subiaco we could agree. With 84 flats we could have remained silent. But 242 flats conjures up visions of the slums of Tokyo, the tenements of London and Glasgow or at best the skyscraping "housing projects" which have proliferated upstream from the United Nations glass house on Manhattan Island. Must we fall for such an error even to please Mr. Graham? For however sincere the Minister may be, it is almost certain that future generations will deplore his handiwork.'⁹

A prompt reply was sent from the Harold Krantz, the senior architect at Krantz and Sheldon, who had designed the complex.

If we are to keep up with progress and development in all other countries of the world, we must overcome our prejudice against large groups of homes built in central positions as flats. ... Slums develop from properties which cannot be adequately maintained because of low returns. The large homes of once-wealthy owners are the best example of this. Properly controlled flats projects, with their comparatively low cost per unity of maintenance and administration, will never deteriorate into slums, and I believe the Government is to be commended for its courage in an honest endeavour to solve this vital problem in the only way possible to achieve quick and effective results.¹⁰

This was not the first time Krantz had defended his flats and the principles behind their designs. Krantz had begun building flats in Perth in the 1930s, and with the formation of Krantz and Sheldon in 1946, the firm became the preeminent designer and builder of flats in Perth. As Simon Anderson wrote in a recent obituary for Krantz:

Krantz and Sheldon produced significant pockets of conglomerates of apartment buildings in and surrounding the CBD; for most West Australians, these buildings constitute urban, albeit residential, Perth from the 1930s to 70s. So, in building approximately 90 per cent of all the flats in Perth, Krantz seemingly single-handedly urbanised the city. And in so doing, he and his firms showed extraordinary social, technical and aesthetic vision.¹¹

In a 1941 article, Krantz addressed the sociological and Economic Aspects of flats with particular reference to the criticism that the 'flats of today are the slums of tomorrow'. His response rested on the premise that 'slums are low-return propositions; whether small cottages, large luxury residences or flats of any kind'.¹²

Harold Krantz's son, David, has claimed that his father persuaded Herb Graham, the Minister for Housing, that high rise flat developments were a significant part of the solution for the housing problems of Perth. David

8 *ibid.*

9 *ibid.*, 1 September 1953, p. 2.

10 *ibid.*, 2 September 1953, p. 2.

11 Simon Anderson, 'Harold Abraham Krantz 12 February 1906 - 8 March 1999'; *The Architect*, Winter 99, p. 10.

12 Harold Krantz, 'Flats Sociological and Economic Aspect', *The Architect*, Vol. 1 No. 11, December 1941, p. 19.

Krantz believes his father influenced the Minister for Housing to commit to the project in Subiaco.¹³

Herb Graham, was the instigator of the decision to build the flats and a staunch defender of the project. During debate in the Legislative Assembly Dame Florence Cardell Oliver (LCL Subiaco) who described the proposal as a 'sabotage of Subiaco'¹⁴ stated that the proposal reminded her of flats in Russia, Manchester, London and Vienna which had been turned into slums. Mr. Graham replied 'What about Sherwood Court in the city? Dame Cardell Oliver added that there was ample land beyond Dalglish to give people homes instead of flats. This view, that there was sufficient land in Western Australia for everyone made the idea of flat life repellent to many people. The perceived danger of flat life to children was seen as a major issue. Dame Cardell Oliver remarked that Mr. Graham's proposal to let children live in a place like this suggested that he knew nothing about family life. Children would be in grave danger because of nearby busy roads.¹⁵

The design of *Wandana Apartment Block* attempted to address the needs of families with children and provide access to gardens. As Harold Krantz stated, the complex was in compliance with the current town planning by-laws by covering approximately 20 per cent of the land area;

(t)he balance of land is made use of lawns, gardens, children's playgrounds, etc. In addition to this, large sections of the ground floor are omitted and the upper stories carried on columns as in the undercroft of the University.¹⁶

Significant to the argument was the fact that *Wandana Apartment Block* was designed to house families in the three storey blocks. The ten storey block was to comprise single bedroom flats.¹⁷

It has been stated that the design for Wandana is loosely based on *Unite d'Habitation*, a high rise residential tower in Marseilles designed by Corbusier in 1952.¹⁸

In achieving the design a significant contribution was made by landscape architect, John Oldham. His landscape design for the complex was detailed in the contemporary magazine, *The Architect*.

It is designed to beautify the areas around the building and soften the forms of the building mass and to leave as much space as possible available to the tenant for outside living.

Native trees and shrubs are used as fully as possible to give the project an Australian character. Several large existing jacarandas were preserved to give immediate scale.

Private lawns and a children's playground are included in an internal court which also contains a protected shade garden, consisting of an informal arrangement of

13 Conversation between David Krantz and Prue Griffin, 26 July 1999.

14 *The West Australian*, 2 September 1953, p. 1.

15 *ibid.*

16 *ibid.*, 2 September 1953, p. 2.

17 Copies of the original plans have been located at the Ministry of Housing and show little difference to today's configuration.

18 See Sharp, R, 'A History of Public Housing in Western Australia', thesis, History Department, Murdoch University, 1993, pp. 75-80.

limestone boulders, combined with large leafed foliage plants selected to give a variety of colours and textures.¹⁹

The landscaping has changed little since planting except where additional car parking was subsequently needed. John Oldham has made a major contribution to landscape design in Western Australia. For his achievements he was awarded the Order of Australia in 1990 and was conferred with a rare membership of the American Society of Landscape Architects.²⁰

Construction of *Wandana Apartment Block* was completed in early 1956, builders A. T. Brine and Sons Pty. Ltd. successfully tendered for the job with a price of £455,000. Costs were minimized by the design of the project by Krantz and Sheldon. A feature of their design work was the economy of the design and building techniques. As Peter Brew explains in the explanatory notes for an exhibition on the work of Krantz and Sheldon.

The exploration of materials and the ease with which they were constructed demonstrate an approach to making buildings that had no parallel in private industry, and which included details which are common practice today, such as full height doors and windows designed to eliminate the necessity of lintels, the manufacture of material to minimum ceiling heights, roll-on paint finishes, ingenious plumbing stacks, and later multi-storey single skin construction.²¹

The opening of the complex on 15 March 1956 was attended by 150 guests. The name 'Wandana' was chosen by the Board of the State Housing Commission. A minute from the meeting dated 17 March 1955 states that the name means 'distant view'.²² It is assumed that the origin is Aboriginal but no dictionaries or word lists currently available have that meaning.

Part of the facilities in the early years of *Wandana Apartment Block* was a restaurant and creche. Business was not good for the leaseholder Mae Lancaster McSwain in 1958, so she requested that the entrance be changed to enable the public to use the restaurant. These changes included the removal of a wooden partition to the entrance of 'Block A'.²³

In 1981, Harold Krantz recorded that *Wandana Apartment Block* had been a project he was still proud of.

...one of the projects of which I am reasonably proud, is Wandana Flats which we built for the Government. It consists of a ten storey tower block and a number of three storey buildings, some 200 flats in the project. And the press and public criticism was very great indeed, these were to be slums of tomorrow. They have now been built for some 20 odd years and they are surrounded by very attractive gardens in good order. Some of the people that are living there have been there almost from the beginning and the Government can be nothing but proud of the Wandana Flats.²⁴

Wandana Apartment Block has not changed significantly since its construction. Photographs taken in 1956 show that the exterior and interiors have changed

19 John Oldham, 'Landscaping of "Wandana" Flats, Subiaco', *The Architect*, March 1957, p. 29-30

20 *The West Australian*, 14 August 1999, p. 49.

21 Peter Brew, 'Modern Flats' in Krantz and Sheldon Architectural Projects, eds. Simon Anderson and Meghan Nordeck, School of Architecture and Fine Arts, UWA, March 1986, p. 7.

22 See Memo 1, letter from the Ministry of Housing, 28 September 1999.

23 SHC file 2320/58, Box 2, Acc 1756, AN 150/11, Battye Library.

24 OH 1799, Battye Library, Interview with Jane Fleming and Harold Krantz, 3 November 1981, p. 5.

little.²⁵ It remains as residential accommodation for tenants of the Ministry of Housing, formerly the State Housing Commission.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Wandana Apartment Block occupies about two-thirds of an approximately triangular block of land contained by Barker Road, Thomas Street, Bagot Road and Coghlan Road. The buildings in the vicinity of *Wandana Apartment Block* consist mainly of single storey houses. There are, in addition, several two storey apartments located on and near the corner of Barker Road and Thomas Street. The three storey offices, currently occupied by BSD Consultants, are located adjacent and to the south of *Wandana Apartment Block*, addressing Bagot Road.

Wandana Apartment Block consists of one ten storey and two three storey apartment blocks, built in a Post-War International style as evidenced by careful massing, plain unadorned wall surfaces, the use of cantilevered balconies and landings, and, on occasion, the clear expression of structure.

The construction of the ten storey block consists of reinforced concrete columns and floors, face brickwork walls, rendered concrete balconies, timber window and door frames, and a timber framed corrugated asbestos roof with a central box gutter.

The three storey apartment blocks are, apart from having load-bearing brickwork and timber framed hipped roofs clad in 'Marseilles' roof tiles, similar in construction to the ten storey block.

Block A, the ten storey apartment block, is rectangular in plan, with the long axis aligned east-west, parallel to Barker Road. The three storey Block B is located to the south of Block A, and consists of three parallel wings aligned with the long axes running north-south, parallel to Coghlan Street. The three north-south wings are of differing lengths, with the easternmost wing being the shortest and the western wing being the longest. The three wings are connected with two short cross wings, both aligned in an east-west direction, parallel to Block A. The ground floors of both of the cross wings of Block B are open undercofts, and consist of concrete paving with concrete columns supporting the solid mass of the apartments above. A central portion of Block A also is open, and supported on columns, so that pedestrian movement in a north-south direction is encouraged. The use of undercofts in both Blocks A and B allows ground level vistas across the site in a north-south line. The triple-storey Block C is located on the north-west of the site, on the corner of Barker and Coghlan Roads. In plan, Block C addresses both frontages. On the Barker Road elevation, however, the plan steps back, creating an entrance courtyard. In addition, the Coghlan Road wing has a right-angled return which addresses a carpark.

The ground floor of Block A has a caretaker's flat, an office, laundry facilities, and a small shop. The nine typical floors have 12 apartments each, a total of 108 apartments. Block B has 64 apartments, and Block C has 69 apartments. *Wandana Apartment Block* has, in total, 241 apartments, plus the caretakers flat.

Two large bitumen paved carparks provide vehicular access to *Wandana Apartment Block* and are entered from Barker and Coghlan Roads, respectively. Each block has a distinctive entrance. The main entrance to Block A is situated on the south-east corner of the building and is clearly visible from Thomas Street. The entrance consists of four parallel reinforced

²⁵ Battye Library Photographs, BA 547/41-46.
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concrete ribs located on the western side of the entrance which, from the ground up, are configured as follows. The ribs are angled about 80 degrees to the horizontal, away from the entrance, and then follow a curve to become horizontal, over the entrance. A thin reinforced concrete roof is supported directly under the ribs and extends about 400mm south of the southernmost rib. Metal letters on the leading edge of the thin concrete roof spell 'BLOCK A'. The corner of the building on the ground floor steps back in plan, and is supported by a circular reinforced concrete column which is painted cream, like the ribs and porch roof, contrasting effectively with the typical red brickwork. From a distance, the entrance is emphasised by vertical glazing in a stairwell immediately beyond. Large vertical metal letters spelling 'WANDANA' extend from the tenth floor down to the seventh floor. Another entrance to Block A is at the west end and consists of a small undercroft defined on the western edge by four circular concrete columns arranged in a north-south line. The undercroft provides access to a lift and a staircase, immediately beyond which is a shop.

An entrance to the grounds of *Wandana Apartment Block* is located near the southernmost point of *Wandana Apartment Block*, between Block B and the building occupied by BSD Consultants. This entrance is similar to that of the Block A in that it consists of three concrete ribs. The ribs run vertically as columns on the west side and then extend horizontally as beams, supporting the thin concrete roof on the underside of the beams. The beams overhang the width of the concrete roof by about 600mm, and then terminate, being supported by three 75mm diameter steel posts. The end of the concrete roof cantilevers past the last rib by about 400mm, then curves upwards by about 300mm. The curved section is surmounted by metal letters about 600mm high which spell "WANDANA".

An entrance to Block B addresses Thomas Street and consists of a thin concrete hood surmounted on the leading edge by metal letters spelling "WANDANA". The concrete hood is supported by two 75mm diameter steel posts which are supported by low brickwork walls to either side. Beyond the hood is a staircase articulated by three long vertical openings with a masonry spandrel at landing height. Alternative entrances to Block B are by means of the undercroft areas previously mentioned.

The main entrance to Block C is located at the end of a wide footpath which runs at right angles to Barker Road and is centrally located in the previously mentioned entrance courtyard. The footpath is paved in cement slabs bordered on both sides by low brick walls. At the end of the footpath is a staircase. The staircase is expressed by two rows of strip glazing on either side of a central narrow strip of brickwork on which the letters "WANDANA" are spelt in vertical metal letters. The strip glazing is contained on each side by projecting brickwork fin walls which are surmounted by a thin flat roof which terminates the vertical nature of the glazing and brickwork. The flat roof is delineated by a cream painted fascia which contrasts with the adjacent typical red brickwork.

A secondary entrance to Block C addresses Coghlan Street and consists of a thin concrete hood which projects about one metre from the wall and is supported by two circular steel posts. On top of the hood, on the leading edge are metal letters which spell "WANDANA". Beyond and on axis with the hood is staircase and a short passage to the other side of the building. The staircase is expressed on the facade by the use of render and by two windows, one above the other. The render is terminated at the top by a boxed eave which is typical of both Block B and Block C. Between the top

window of the staircase and the eave are metal letters which spell “BLOCK C”

Wandana Apartment Block has a mixture of both one and two bedroom apartments. A single bedroom apartment was available for inspection, and a typical layout is as follows:

The half glazed entrance door leads from the accessway directly on to the lounge, beyond which is a partially cantilevered balcony. Doors from the lounge lead on to a kitchen and the bedroom, respectively. The kitchen is located on the accessway side and the bedroom is on the balcony side. The bathroom is located adjacent to the kitchen and is entered via the bedroom, and consists of a toilet, basin and bathroom, all located on the party wall.

The floors in the lounge room, bedroom and kitchen are timber, over which has been applied carpet, and to the kitchen, linoleum. The timber floors are constructed on the structural concrete floor, presumably in order to run services in the voids formed between the two floors, and also perhaps to reduce sound transmission vertically between apartments. The wall finishes consist of painted face brickwork up to a height of about 1400mm above floor level, above which is plaster. The junction between the two finishes is defined by a slight corbel in the top course of face brickwork, like a masonry dado.

The extensive original landscaping of *Wandana Apartment* is still largely intact, except where it has been substantially diminished by the construction of the two carparks.

The exterior modifications to *Wandana Apartment Block* are of a minimal nature and consist mainly of the installation of concrete disabled access ramps.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Wandana Apartment Block was the first attempt at multi-storey public housing in Western Australia. Other State Housing Commission flat complexes followed, including Graham Flats, West Perth (1958), Tingira, East Fremantle (1961; demolition licence issued in January 2000, but currently subject to an appeal), Myuna, North Fremantle (c. 1960; demolished 1999) and Brownlie Towers, Bentley (1970/1).²⁶

Information provided by Heritage Victoria indicates that no high rise flats have been registered in that State. Two low rise apartment blocks with stylistic similarities to *Wandana Apartment Block* are Cairo Flats located at 98 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy and Caringal Flats located at 3 Tahara Road, Toorak. Both of these are included on the Victorian Heritage Register.²⁷ Cairo Flats, a two storey block containing 28 bachelor flats were built in 1936 and designed by architect Acheson Best Overend. Caringal Flats comprises one three storey block and one six storey block with a total of 18 flats, were built in 1952 and designed by architect William Rivett. Victoria has not to date registered any Housing Commission flats and information provided by Heritage Victoria indicates that the first high rise Housing Commission blocks in Melbourne were not constructed until 1961.²⁸ There are therefore no blocks in Victoria contemporary with *Wandana Apartment Block*.

²⁶ See Sharp, op. cit.

²⁷ Information extracted from Victorian Heritage Register On-Line, VHR Nos H579 and H1005.

²⁸ Patrick Miller, Heritage Victoria, telephone interview with Rosemary Rosario, 23 February

Information from English Heritage indicates that three blocks of high rise flats are listed in the UK. They are Brooke House, Nos 1-84 Town Square, Basildon, Essex; Centre Point and Pond to Front, 101 and 103 New Oxford Street, Camden City of London, Greater London and Trellick Tower, Golbourne Road, Kensington, Kensington and Chelsea, Greater London.²⁹ Further research is required to identify whether these blocks comprise public or private housing and their dates of construction.

Krantz was an early designer of flats for the Perth area. He designed a number of 'bachelor-flats' for single people working in the city in the 1930s. These include Riviera Flats, Mill Street (1939; now demolished). Flats designed by Krantz and Sheldon are common in the Perth metropolitan area; however, most are smaller in scale than the main block at *Wandana Apartment Block*. Examples include, 'Bondi', Hill Street Perth built in 1955; 'The Heights, South Perth, 1964; 'Hillside Gardens', Malcolm Street Perth built in 1963 and 'Ferry Court' South Perth built in 1962.

13. 4 REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

2000.

²⁹ Information provided by Alyson Rogers to Rosemary Rosario, 24 February 2000.