

## CHAPTER XI - CAMPUS PROSPECT

Like most of its sister institutions in Australia, the University had both siting and building problems of varying magnitude throughout its first half century. Looking back in 1962, however, governing body and staff could claim two related advantages. At no time did they or their predecessors have cause to regret the location or the extent of their major campus. Nor was the University during any significant building period without a guiding plan for the effective occupation and development of the Crawley site. In one respect, indeed, the University of Western Australia was unique among its Australian fellows. Thanks to the foresight and political finesse of Winthrop Hackett and to the architectural imagination of Desbrowe-Annear the University had a detailed campus layout before it could be sure that it had a campus!

~~As the pages of this chapter will reveal~~ there was to be more than one layout plan. The original, which came from Collins Street, Melbourne, in 1915, was drastically revised by a professorial architect from the University of Sydney in 1927 (?). The latter's influence was to prove considerable; the Hackett block and its environs of the 'thirties owed as much to Professor Wilkinson's general concept of the Crawley campus as it did to the architectural attractions of the winning Alsop-Sayce design. Even so, the influence of the original Desbrowe-Annear layout could still be detected on the developing campus of the 'sixties, while much of the



detail of Professor Wilkinson's ~~revised~~ plan of 1927 ~~(#)~~ was itself adapted to changing circumstances in the rapid post-war expansion of the campus, especially in the middle 'fifties and after.

At this crucial point, moreover, a fortunate concurrence of circumstances ~~and~~ <sup>including</sup> the keen interest of an Acting Vice-Chancellor and of the third Vice-Chancellor made possible a master plan for the campus. This was produced by an English town planner with North American experience who had already made his mark on the metropolitan area of Perth and who in 1960 became the University's full-time consultant architect.

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← The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in August 1914 had delayed government action arising out of the belated and hard won Senate decision earlier in the year in favour of the Crawley site. On 16 November Hackett sent a memorandum to senators urging action <sup>to</sup> ~~which would~~ 'avert what, in the absence of a scheme to work from, may prove costly mistakes in the future in regard to the University grand design'. He disclaimed 'any intention of aiding in the resurrection of a large and polemical question' but expressed the hope that he might be allowed to prepare the way for further work and at the same time 'relieve a congested unemployed market among



our architects' by offering two prizes of 100 guineas and 25 guineas for the best suggestions or plan for laying out for University purposes of the grounds on both sides of the Perth-Fremantle Road.<sup>1</sup>

On 20 November a Senate committee consisting of the Chancellor, <sup>the</sup> Pro-Chancellor, <sup>the</sup> Vice-Chancellor, Riley, Battye and Somerville discussed draft conditions for the competition. These were approved at a later meeting on 4 December and printed as Information, Conditions and Particulars for Guidance in the Preparation of Competitive Designs for laying-out the University Grounds and Gardens including the Disposition of the Buildings of the University of Western Australia<sup>2</sup>.

This document indicated that designers should give special consideration to the allocation of appropriate areas, suitably situated and embracing sites for a central group of buildings (capable of extension), a faculty of arts group (including a conservatorium of music 'not required at present' but to be provided for 'at a considerable distance from other buildings'), science, mining and engineering, agricultural and veterinary science departments (the last two to have room for 'trial plots', 'considerable space for animals', etc.), a medical school, colleges, professors' residences and caretakers' cottages and a University oval, a practice ground, a boat shed on the river ('also women's boat shed') and aquarium and gardens.

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- 1 Sen. Min. .... Nov. 1914. Copy of memorandum and some relevant papers are enclosed in a Building Committee minute book the contents of which deal exclusively with the Chancellor's prizes.
  - 2 Government Printer, Perth, 1914.

but beginning  
with a great  
hall, a  
library,  
administration  
offices and  
lectures,  
Students',  
common  
rooms,



The competition closed on 31 May 1915 and produced 26 designs. On 29 June a board of adjudicators, consisting of all members of the Senate committee, with the exception of the Pro-Chancellor and <sup>with</sup> the addition of the Chief Government Architect, Hillson Beasley, selected six designs for further consideration. These were further short-listed to three from which, on 9 July, the adjudicators awarded the first prize to H. Desbrowe-Annear of Melbourne and the second to H. W. Hargrave of T. & G. Chambers, Perth. The third, which <sup>shortlisted entry</sup> received 'honorable mention', was from J. Cheal & Sons Ltd whose accompanying submission was on notepaper headed, strangely enough, 'Nurserymen, Seedsmen & Sundriesmen, Landscape Gardeners & Garden Furnishers, The Nurseries, Crawley, England'. A voting table in Whitfeld's handwriting indicated that all members of the committee except Somerville had favoured the Desbrowe-Annear design while Battye and the Chancellor would have <sup>given second place to</sup> preferred the English <sup>rather than</sup> the local entry to which Somerville would have awarded the first prize. The adjudicators decided to accompany their recommendation with the statement that no design satisfied them entirely.

<sup>As</sup> ~~In the~~ winner of the Chancellor's prize the University was fortunate to attract a man of ideas. Harold Desbrowe-Annear (1866-1933) described himself in the covering letter attached to his winning entry as 'architect and designer'.<sup>3</sup> His special field was domestic architecture in which a few years later he 'broke the chain of his contemporary architects plodding in their slow circle of historical styles'

According to a mid 20th Century authority, he

<sup>3</sup> The document is unattached in the Buildings Committee minute book.



by grasping 'the precepts of Functionalism'.<sup>4</sup> The plans he drew for homes in the suburbs of Melbourne were subsequently described *by the same forthright but in this case appreciative critic* ~~by a forthright but in this instance appreciative critic~~ as 'simple, generous, enthusiastically direct and to the point'.<sup>5</sup> Readers may judge for themselves whether all these adjectives applied to the Desbrowe-Annear design for the Crawley layout as re-drawn, ~~from the University's print mounted on linen,~~ for comparative reproduction in these pages along with subsequent site development plans.

The plan gave the campus a focal point on the continuation of Ferdinand Street, later known as Winthrop Avenue. This point would presumably have been marked by a monument or statue sited approximately some <sup>250</sup>~~150~~ yards south of the junction of Ferdinand Street and the Perth-Fremantle Road (Winthrop Avenue and Stirling Highway). From this point there was a series of radial roads with ~~leadings~~ the main axis heading east-south-east and ending on a new University jetty, with subsidiary axes leading towards Fairway, Myers Street, Crawley House and Perth.

On the north side of the Perth-Fremantle Road Desbrowe-Annear placed the five colleges referred to in Chapter X above and, on the eastern slope of this land, with a view across Crawley Bay, the required professors' houses. Each of these was generously outlined, on the assumption, no doubt, that academic salaries would be substantial and domestic labour cheap and plentiful.

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4 Boyd, R., Australia's Home (Melbourne, 1952), p.160.

5 Ibid., p.162.



The medical centre (including not only the school but also a hospital, an institute, a building for tropical medicine and a residence for medical officers) was placed in the triangle which in later years was crossed by Battye Avenue. Immediately south of the medical centre were the biological sciences buildings disposed about the main axis and overlooking the bay.

The central block of buildings, forming two inner quadrangles, lay between the focal point and the meeting of Fairway with the Perth-Fremantle Road where ~~(A)~~ the main <sup>gateway</sup> ~~entrance~~ to the University was envisaged. The arts and science requirements listed by the Senate committee were included in this central group but the students' buildings were placed further east, substantially on the location, though not in the form, of the Guild buildings actually erected some fifteen years later. Mining and engineering <sup>were</sup> also placed some distance from the central block, to the south ~~near~~ near Fairway, approximately on the site of the new physics building opened in 1962, while the committee's instructions were observed by siting the conservatorium in lonely splendour in the position to be occupied in the 'sixties by the laboratories of the Engineering School. Agriculture and veterinary science with their experimental plots were given a comparably isolated position, substantially equivalent with that on which the Institute of Agriculture was erected in 193..., on the southern 'peninsula' south of what became an extended Myers Street.

Sporting interests were well catered for. A sports arena with pavilion was proposed for the site which became James Oval and a practice oval was placed at the junction of Hampden and Perth-Fremantle roads on land which was to be for long



used as a hockey ground. A series of practice tennis courts with a championship court immediately to the north of them were planned for the site to be occupied by the second and third stages of the chemistry buildings after 1962.

One of the most interesting features of the Desbrowe-Annear layout was its provision for a University Union. No request had been made for this in the Information, Conditions and Particulars prepared by the Senate committee and no such building was erected until University House<sup>6</sup> in 1961 took over the functions of a private house near Fairway which the Senate had purchased for the purpose in 1958(?). Very appropriately Desbrowe-Annear chose the homestead Crawley House as the University Union, despite the fact that it had already been occupied since the preceding year as inadequate temporary headquarters for the Engineering School which remained there until 1960. The required gardeners' cottages were placed to the south of the Crawley House farm buildings which are shown on the plan. Of these only the dairy remained half a century later more or less in its original form. Probably older than Crawley House itself, the dairy was in 1960 attached to the hut which was converted into the Dolphin Theatre.

While the Desbrowe-Annear layout at first sight bears little resemblance to the developmental plans for the Crawley site which took shape as the permanent buildings were erected between 1927 and 1962, careful analysis reveals its influence on the campus to have been considerable. The idea of confining residence mainly to the northern

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<sup>6</sup> See the next section of this chapter.



side of the Perth-Fremantle Road was sound. It persisted despite the early mistake of siting Geology and Biology on the north-eastern corner of the campus in <sup>the mid 'twenties</sup> 1925 (?)<sup>7</sup> and the abandonment of professors' houses in favour of colleges beginning from the north-eastern rather than the north-western end.<sup>8</sup> The limited concept of the medical centre revealed an understandable lack of appreciation of the developing hospital requirements of the metropolitan area. If this was a weakness, however, responsibility lay with the Senate committee rather than with an architect-designer from outside the State. In any case, subsequent Senate policy of the 'fifties and 'sixties endorsed the principle of a medical school on the campus with adjacent hospital facilities, though the actual siting proposed was still further north of the Perth-Fremantle Road.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly the provision for open spaces and sporting facilities on the campus stood the test of time. Even when the expanding building programme of the early 'sixties necessitated some restriction in this matter and foreshadowed the transference of some practice grounds to the Shenton Park area the Desbrowe-Annear concept was evident in the retention of James Oval and in the vistas from the central block of 1915 looking towards Crawley Bay which were still visible after the substantial modification of the Desbrowe-Annear layout by the Wilkinson Plan of 1927 and the more considerable development of the Hackett and old Physics-Chemistry blocks <sup>South and east of which was</sup> planned by Professor Stephenson from the middle 'fifties to the early 'sixties.

7 See above, Ch. .... and below, p.

8 See above, Ch. X.

9 See section .... of this chapter.



A <sup>negative</sup> noteworthy <sup>was</sup> minor features of the 1915 layout plan ~~were also~~ its non-extension of Myers Street. The decision subsequently made to allow this street to cross the neck of the site between Parkway and Hackett Drive had the unfortunate effect of cutting through the court which <sup>would</sup> ~~acted~~ as a focal point for the biological sciences. Desbrowe-Annear's siting of the gardeners' cottages was also followed in practice, the position being considered favourably in the early 'sixties as very suitable for central buildings for gardeners.

There was no fundamental change in the layout proposed by Desbrowe-Annear until the Wilkinson Plan of <sup>1926-27</sup> ~~1927 (?)~~. By 1922, however, with the final settlement of the revived Crawley site controversy and the improved financial position indirectly resulting from the disallowance of the statute imposing fees,<sup>10</sup> Crawley building projects were in the air. On 15 May <sup>of that year</sup> the Senate received a recommendation from the Professorial Board that 'as many as practicable of the Science Departments should be moved to Crawley in the following order: Biology, Geology, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture'. The Senate decided to appoint a committee, consisting of Sir Talbot Hobbs,<sup>11</sup> Professor Whitfeld and two other architects, W. B. Hardwick (check that he was an architect) and A. R. L. Wright, to report on 'the buildings required for the transfer of the Departments of Biology and Geology and their adaptation to the first prize design for the layout of the permanent site'.<sup>12</sup> On 17 July the Senate considered

<sup>10</sup> See above, Ch. III, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Lt.-Gen. Sir J. J. Talbot Hobbs (1864-19..), K.C.B., K.C.M.G., V.D., Hon.LLD., F.R.I.B.A. (W.A.), whose architectural firm were subsequently responsible for the design of St George's College - see below.

<sup>12</sup> Sen. Min., 15 May 1922.



a report from this committee signed by Hobbs as its chairman and a minority report from Whitfeld, who had been absent from two of the three meetings of the committee.

The Hobbs majority report was a slashing attack on the Desbrowe-Annear layout combined with a thinly veiled attempt once more to discredit the Crawley site as such. The layout of the buildings by Desbrowe-Annear was declared to be 'quite unsuitable and unadaptable to the ground'. Objection was raised to the angle at which they were sited 'to make them fit the small knoll or plateau on the South side of the Perth-Fremantle Road'. Because of the fall of the ground great expense would be involved in raising the buildings 'to a dignified and imposing elevation'. In any case drainage difficulties were very great, the committee being of the opinion that 'at least one third of the total area available is owing to its low-lying unsuitable for the University Buildings; a great deal of it even for playing fields in winter ...'<sup>13</sup> While Hobbs and his two co-signatories would have welcomed the abandonment of the whole of the Crawley site they did specifically recommend that the area allotted by Desbrowe-Annear to professors' residences north of the Perth-Fremantle Road should be used for 'the Science Departments (including Biology and Geology) ...', though they insisted that this would be costly 'owing to the contour of the ground'.

*In his minority report*  
Whitfeld 'disagreed entirely' with the argument about drainage

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<sup>13</sup> Majority and minority reports are attached to Sen. Min. 17 July, 1922.



and relied instead on the report on this subject adopted by the Engineering School. He also expressed the view that the extra cost of building on the northern slopes was not 'a very material item'.

The Senate decided that the general question of the Crawley site did not 'arise out of the present proposal' and resolved to refer the Desbrowe-Annear layout to the ~~heads of~~ University departments for suggested modifications to meet departmental needs. On 26 July the heads of departments met and resolved unanimously to submit seven recommendations to the Senate. The substance of these was threefold: first, that the professors' residences be eliminated; second, that the space vacated be used for ~~four~~ science departments, beginning with Biology and Geology; and, third, that the Desbrowe-Annear layout be otherwise retained with the central block 'allotted to the Administrative Office, the Library, the Great Hall and the Faculties of Arts and Law'.<sup>14</sup> This report was adopted by the Senate, which proceeded to ask the Government to provide accommodation for Biology and Geology on the north-eastern corner of the campus, north of the Perth-Fremantle Road.

The result was an amended version of the Desbrowe-Annear plan copy of which is extant with date 3 September 1923 and initials 'W.W.', which have not been identified by the writer. This shows Biology and Geology as recommended, with Agriculture also moved north of the Perth-Fremantle Road, ~~as~~ recommended by the heads of departments in July 1922~~4~~. An Aquarium occupied the site previously allotted for medical officers' residences - possibly because the land was low-lying(!) -

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<sup>14</sup> The heads of departments' report is attached to Sen. Min., 21 Aug. 1922.



and the Guild buildings disappeared, their place being taken by St Cecilia's Ladies' College, its original site north of the Perth-Fremantle Road being taken by a garden. The location of the sports and practice ovals remained unchanged from 1915.