ACT Heritage Council

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
HERITAGE REGISTER
Background Information

CAMERON OFFICES WING 3 AND BRIDGE, WINGS 4 AND 5 AND LINK

BLOCK 7, 13, 15, 17 AND 19, SECTION 44; BLOCK 8, SECTION 49; BLOCK 1, SECTION 193; BLOCK 1, SECTION 194; AND BLOCK 1, SECTION 195, BELCONNEN

At its meeting of 23 September 2026, the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Cameron Offices Wing 3 and Bridge, Wings 4 and 5 and Link (Cameron Offices), was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Cameron Offices against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s 10 of the Heritage Act 2004.

Preamble

Cameron Offices was listed in 2004 on the Commonwealth Heritage List. On 16 December 2025 the Commonwealth status was revoked. Under the terms of the land transfer the property was nominated to the ACT Heritage Register.

Description

Cameron Offices is located in Chandler Street in the Belconnen Town Centre and comprises today of 3 buildings (wings), a pedestrian bridge between Wing 3 and Wing 4 (the Bridge), and a linking structure between Wings 4 and 5 (the Link). The complex is bounded by Benjamin Way to the west and Chandler Street to the east.

When constructed Cameron Offices comprised 9 parallel office wings running east-west, of which only Wings 3, 4, and 5 remain. Wing 3 is to the north of Cameron Avenue and Wing 4 and 5 to the south. Wings 3 and 4 are connected by a pedestrian bridge over Cameron Avenue, while Wings 4 and 5 are linked at the eastern end by a north-south pedestrian spine known as the 'mall'.

Each mall contains 3 levels of offices, toilets and kitchens with walkways, lifts and stairs. The mall provides the principal circulation routes, connecting offices vertically and horizontally, north-south and east-west. To the west of each mall are the main office areas, comprising 3 levels of offices over a basement. The offices are divided into 2 modules, B and C, with floor

levels in module C offset by half a storey from module B.

The wings follow the slope of the land along Cameron Avenue and present a strong horizontal form through their low rise and the expression of the floor levels on the exterior. All external concrete retains off-form concrete finishes.

A landscaped courtyard separates Wings 4 and 5. The basic layout was retained and still exists, but the plant species were changed in the mid-80s and possibly since. A watercourse has also been realigned and is no longer used. Former rooftop tennis courts and planted terraces have also been sheeted over with metal roofing.

Wing 3 is currently vacant, while Wings 4 and 5 have been adaptively reused as student residences for the University of Canberra.

History

Canberra's expansion from the Griffins' Plan to the later Y Plan is reflected in the development of the Woden and Belconnen town centres during the 1960s–70s. Belconnen, the second town centre designed by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), was planned to support population growth and provide government office accommodation essential to developing the new urban centres (NCDC 1970:95).

Commissioned by the NCDC, the Cameron Offices were designed by architect John Hamilton Andrews AO, between 1968 and 1977, and constructed from 1970 to 1977. At the time, they formed Australia's largest office complex and were the first major building in the emerging Belconnen town centre intended to establish a civic focus (EMAA 2025a and b).

The original complex comprised of 9 interconnected wings stepping along the site's contours and was conceived as the first stage of a larger megastructure. Andrews collaborated with structural engineer Peter Owen Miller to develop innovative construction systems, resulting in an early Australian expression of Structuralism emphasising interdependent built forms within a coherent urban order (ACT Heritage Library 2026).

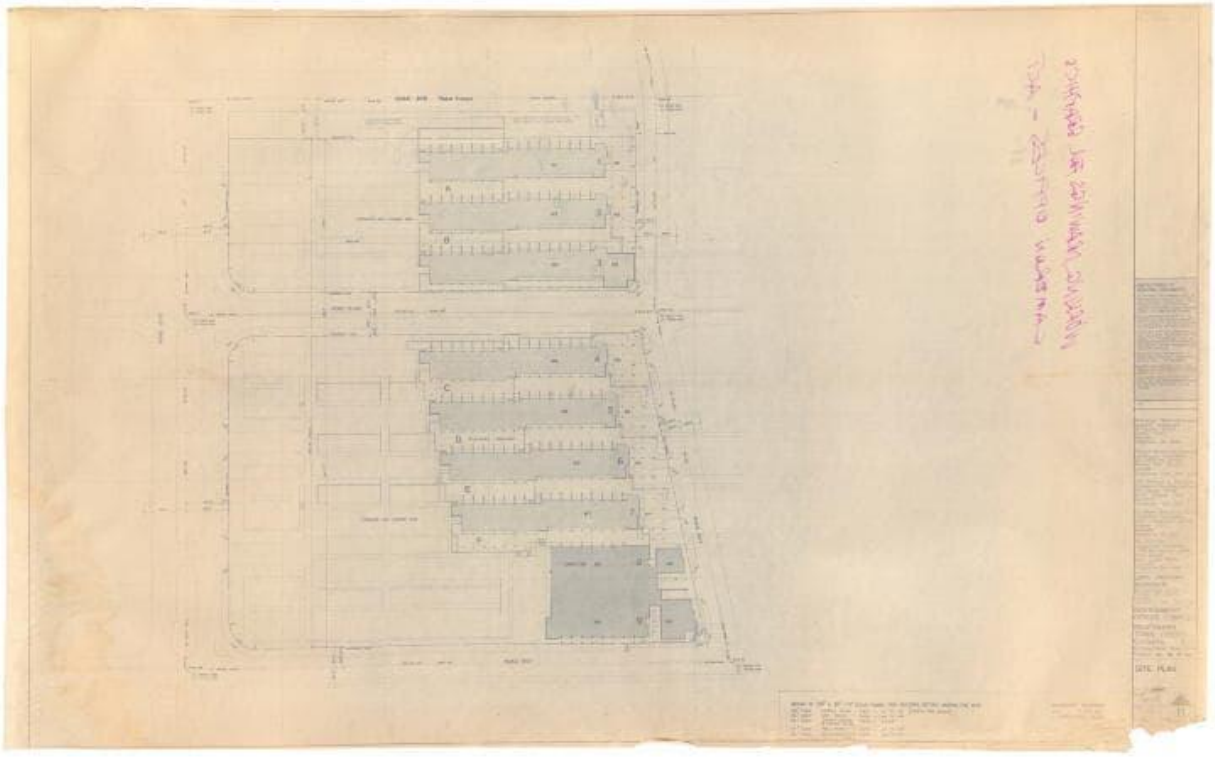


Image 1: Site plan 1970 (Powerhouse Museum 2025).

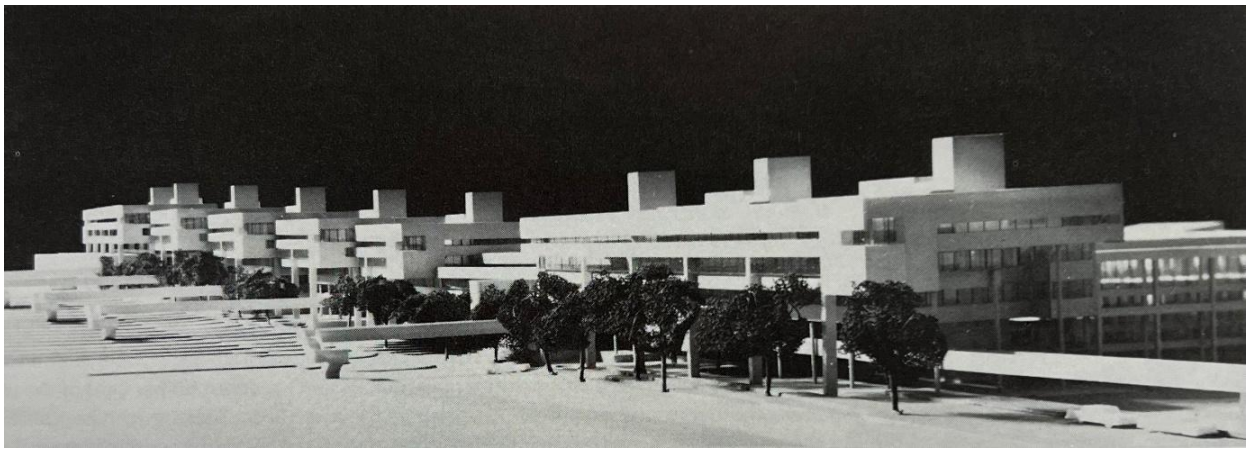


Image 2: Study model of first government office complex, Belconnen Town Centre (NCDC 1970:148).

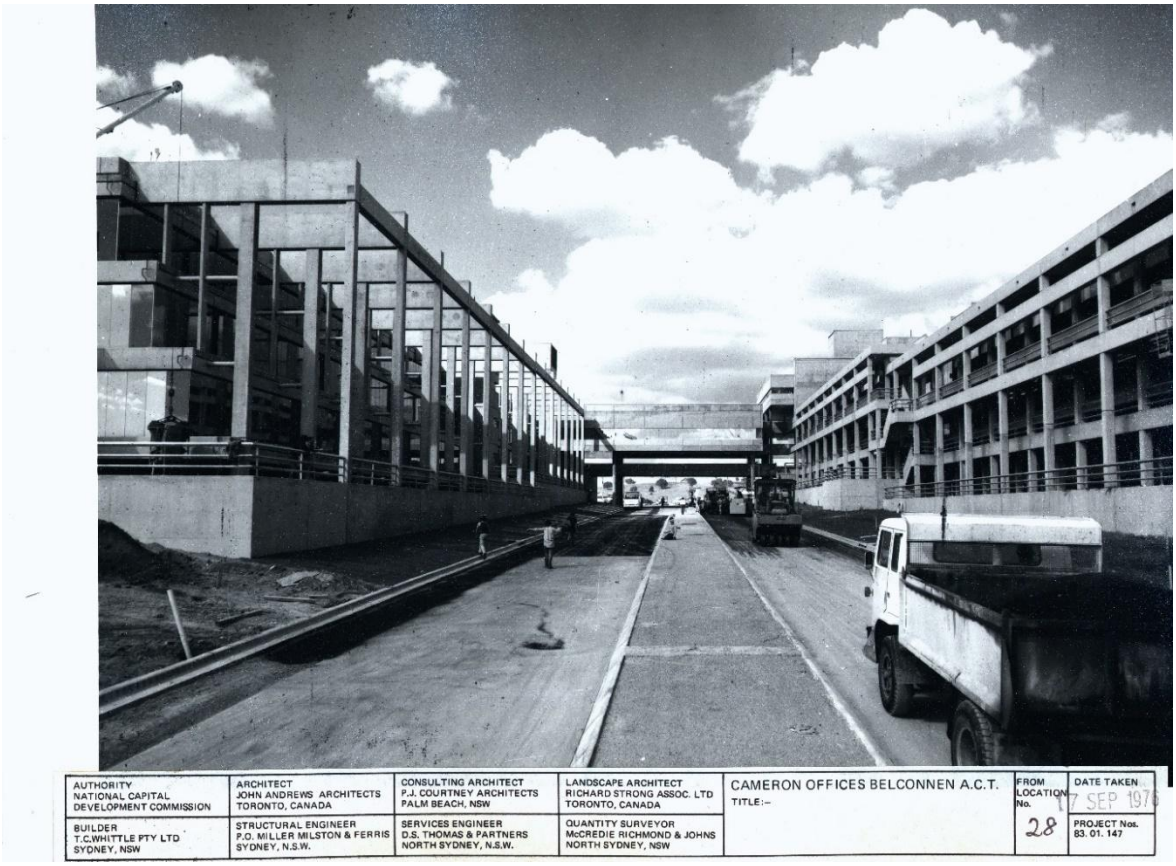


Image 3: Wings 3 and 4 and pedestrian bridge over Cameron Avenue during construction of Cameron Offices in 1976 (ACT Heritage Library 2026).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics occupied the complex for much of its early life, during which its design influenced subsequent NCDC office briefs. Despite its architectural innovation, the building experienced ongoing maintenance problems, particularly roof leaks, and was subject to several redevelopment proposals (Docomomo 2025).

Between 2007 and 2008, most of the complex was demolished, except for wings 3, 4, 5, the pedestrian bridge and the link, which were listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List in 2004. These retained elements were adaptively reused: wing 5 was converted to student accommodation in 2010, wing 4 was similarly converted in 2014, and wing 3 continued to be used as an office (EMAA 2025a and b).

The design and construction of the Cameron Offices played a significant role in influencing other brutalist developments in Canberra, including the Callam Offices, the High Court and the National Gallery of Australia. Of the registered places in the Territory the Callam Offices and the Belconnen and Dickson Libraries are comparative in terms of brutalist architecture. Cameron Offices, however, was of a much greater scale and was the premier office development for this era by the NCDC for the Belconnen Town Centre.

The Cameron Offices achieved national and international recognition, appearing in architectural publications, including the World Register of Significant 20th Century Architecture (EMAA 2025a). The project also contributed to Canberra's broader collection of

NCDC-commissioned office complexes and influenced a range of major civic and institutional buildings of the period, many of which explored new expressions in exposed concrete.

Buildings documented as being influenced by the Cameron Offices include John Andrews' Callam Offices in Woden (1977–1981), the Canberra School of Music by Daryl Jackson and Evan Walker (1970–1976), the Edmund Barton Building by Harry Seidler (1970–1974), and notably the High Court of Australia (1975–1980) and National Gallery of Australia (1973–1982) by Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Briggs (NCDC 1970–1980).

Design

The Cameron Offices are a leading Australian example of late 20th century international style architecture and late 20th century brutalist style architecture (Apperly et al. 1994:252-255). Architect John Andrews rejected the term brutalist, however, and saw his work as 'humanist', driven by a pragmatic, common sense approach to site, function, and user experience, rather than an ideological adherence to a specific style. Andrews used concrete not for its rawness, but because it was the most practical material available to create the desired, complex forms quickly (University of Toronto 2022; Walker 2023:234).

Andrews' design also reflected a structuralist planning approach, treating the buildings as components of a broader urban system that emphasised pedestrian movement and visual connection to landscaped spaces (ACT Heritage Library 2026). It is widely regarded as Australia's first, and possibly only, fully realised architectural example of Structuralism.

The final design comprised 9 parallel, 4-storey wings connected by an elevated pedestrian mall and a bridge across Cameron Avenue. These pedestrian malls formed the principal circulation system, providing vertical and horizontal access and linking the offices internally and externally. The stepped wings were aligned with the site's natural contours and were intended to connect to surrounding residential and retail areas via a coordinated network of pedestrian walkways (EMAA 2025a; 2025b).

Visual unity across the complex was achieved through a restricted material palette, with an emphasis on robust, low-maintenance materials. Light buff concrete, coloured and textured using local sands, dominates the exterior and integrates precast and in situ concrete construction with landscaped elements. This approach reinforced the architectural cohesion of the complex and its relationship to the surrounding landscape (NCDC 1971).

Innovative elements include precast post-tensioned T-beams integrating lighting and air-conditioning services; half-level stepped floors; hung floor plates supported by gallows beams; deep north-facing overhangs; Corbusian ribbon windows; long cantilevered concrete balustrades along the internal malls; and landscaped courtyards incorporating native plantings and water features.

The landscape setting for Cameron Offices, designed by Steve Moorehead, was based on an Australian bush garden style, using native plants and bush themes in a naturalistic and informal way. The original plantings recreated various Australian landscape themes in each

of the 6 courtyards, ranging from the Monaro Plains to dry desert themes. The landscaping created a close integration between building and landscape, and was designed as a device for orientation, circulation and relaxation. The courtyard landscaping between each wing was continued as tree plantings extending through the car parks.

Key characteristics of late 20th century brutalist architecture visible at Cameron Offices include:

- Large scale
- Hefty, chunky and blocky character
- Off-form reinforced concrete
- Free-standing sculpture/s or ordered landscaping
- Diagonal, sloping or strong curved elements often contrasting with strictly horizontal and vertical features
- Large areas of unbroken wall surface
- Vertical slit windows
- Use of non-load bearing precast elements
- Reinforced concrete in frame or panel construction

Additional architectural features include:

- Cubiform massing, expressed structural frame, and extensive areas of plain wall surfaces
- Strongly composed concrete forms, with off-form reinforced concrete a dominant material expression
- Stepped four-storey wings following the site contours, creating terraced forms that emphasise the natural landform
- Structural innovation, notably the use of post-tensioned precast concrete T-beams, elements that integrated lighting and air-conditioning services
- Gallows beam system, supporting floors hung from the southern side to achieve column-free internal spaces
- Overhanging upper floors providing passive solar shading
- Corbusian ribbon windows, cantilevers, and long continuous concrete balustrades along the central mall
- Courtyard landscaping incorporating native plants and water elements, creating a uniquely Australian office landscape and emphasising visual connection to greenery

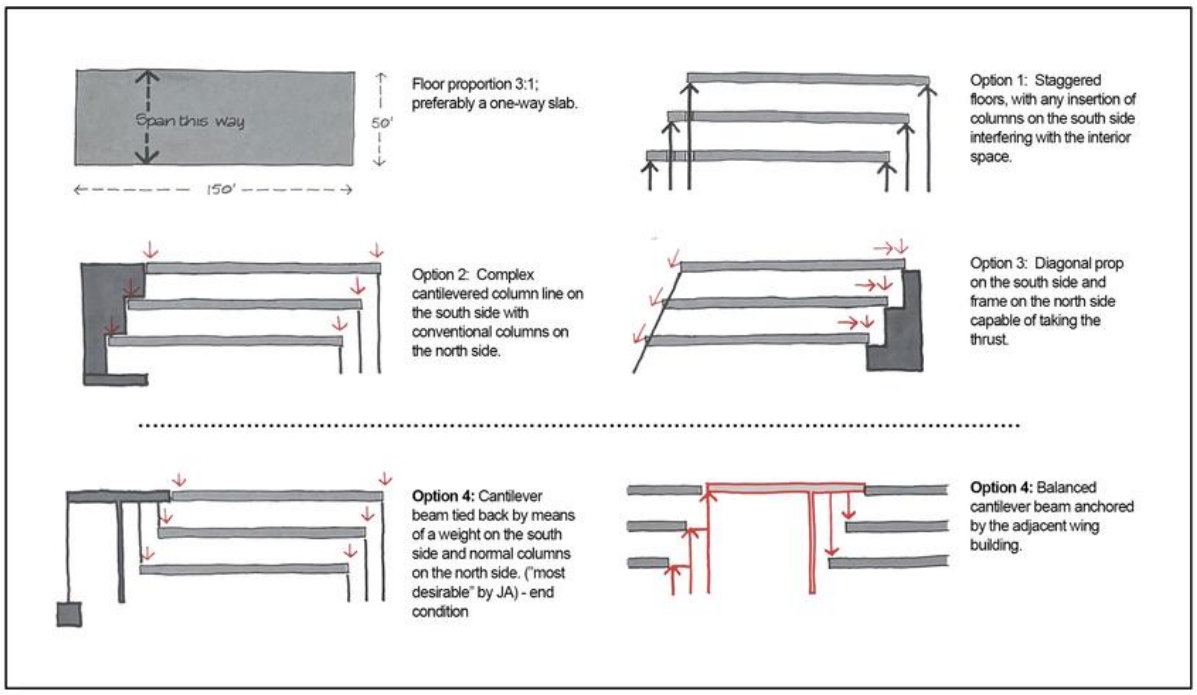


Image 4: Structural strategies as elaborated by John Andrews. Option 4 shows the selected system adopting hanging T-beams (Stracchi 2026).

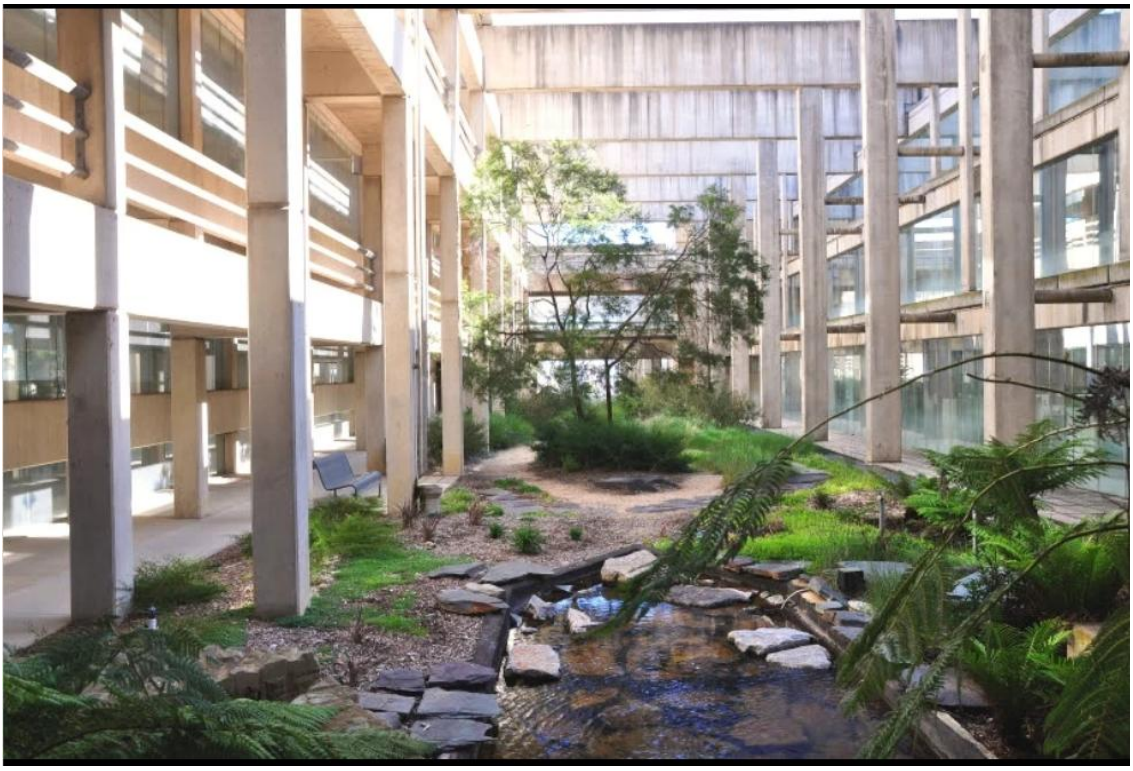


Image 5: Landscaped courtyard 1977, Cameron Offices (Docomomo 2025).



Image 6: Wing 3 Cameron Offices with the end of wing 4 partially visible in the far right (Wikimedia Commons 2014).



Image 7: The Cameron Offices allowed for adaptable layouts and maximised space through the use of 'T' beams (Archives ACT 1984-87).

John Hamilton Andrews AO (1933-2022)

John Hamilton Andrews, born and educated in Sydney, completed a Master of Architecture at Harvard University in 1957 under José Luis Sert.

Sir John Overall and the NCDC invited Andrews to return from his established Canadian practice to design the Cameron Offices—one of his major Australian works and a leading example of Structuralism (Goad 2022). Alongside the American Express Tower in Sydney (1976), the Cameron Offices represent 1 of his 2 most substantial Australian projects.

Andrews received numerous honours, including the RAIA Gold Medal (1980), the Order of Australia (1981), and the Centenary Medal (2001). His work has attracted significant scholarly attention, unmatched by most Australian Modernist architects (Battison 2018).

His reputation led to invitations to serve on design competition juries for Australia's new Parliament House and the National Archives Building. His work in Canberra influenced the design approach for future Commonwealth office complexes and reflected the forward-looking vision of the NCDC under Sir John Overall (ACT Heritage Library 2026).

After an acclaimed career in Canada, Andrews relocated to Australia in 1969 to undertake the Cameron Offices project, renaming his Palm Beach–based practice John Andrews International, from which he continued to work nationally and internationally (Murray 2018).

Andrews' other notable work in Canberra included:

- Student residences at CCAE, now University of Canberra (1973-5)
- Belconnen Bus Terminal (1976-8)
- Toad Hall, ANU (1977)
- Woden TAFE College, now Callam Offices (1980)

Widely regarded as one of Australia's most internationally significant and first internationally recognised architects, Andrews passed away on 24 March 2022 at his home in Orange (AIA 2025).

Peter Owen Miller (1922-2013)

Peter Owen Miller was the structural engineer for the Cameron Offices and was responsible for developing the innovative concrete structural system that made the complex possible. Working closely with John Andrews, Miller designed the precast, post-tensioned concrete framework, including the distinctive gallows beam system, which enabled large column-free office spaces while expressing the building's structural form.

His engineering solution integrated structure, sun-shading and architectural expression, contributing significantly to the Cameron Offices' status as one of Australia's most important and technically innovative Brutalist buildings.

Integrity

Of the original 9 wings, only wings 3, 4, and 5, pedestrian bridge, and link between wings 4 and 5 remain intact, as a representative sample. Despite partial demolition of the complex in 2005, these surviving components retain key original design attributes, including the stepped, modular wing configuration, off-form concrete finishes, integrated structural-services elements, the landscaped courtyard settings (AIA 2025).

Adaptive reuse has occurred, with wings 4 and 5 converted for student accommodation (Weedon Lodge) and wing 3 most recently used as an office. Wing 3 is currently vacant and in need of refurbishment. Vandals have caused some superficial damage. The owners have advised they will be renovating in the near future. While some internal layouts have been modified to meet contemporary requirements, these changes do not obscure the architectural and planning significance of the surviving wings. The principal external forms, scale, and structural innovations remain legible.

Courtyard landscapes have been partially altered through redevelopment, including replacement of plant species in the mid-1980s, alteration of a watercourse, and covering original rooftop garden terraces and tennis courts with metal roofing. However, the original design intent of integrating native planting zones within workspace environments is still generally reflected in the existing courtyard.

Wing 5, left vacant after the demolitions, was adapted into student accommodation known as Weedon Lodge in 2010, serving the nearby University of Canberra with self-contained apartments and studios. Wings 4 and 5, corresponding to the north and south wings, underwent further conversion to student housing between 2013 and 2014, involving interior reconfigurations such as residential partitioning while maintaining the original exterior and fixed glazing. These changes demonstrate sustainable adaptive reuse, extending the life of the brutalist structure without major external alterations.



Image 8: Pedestrian bridge over Cameron Avenue between wings 3 and 4 (Artstreetecture 2016).

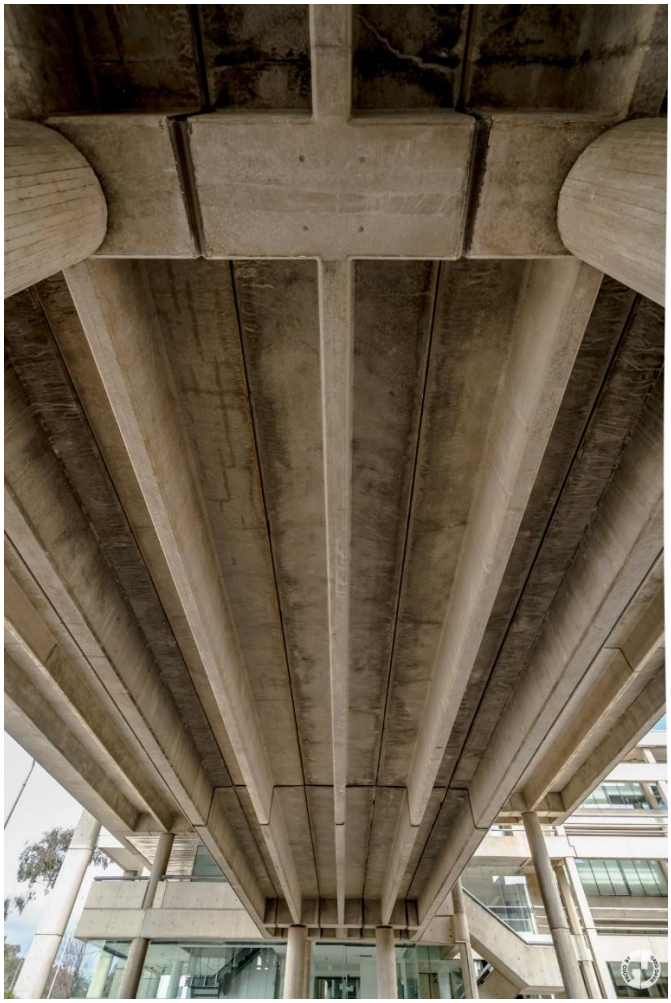


Image 9: Underside of the bridge over Cameron Avenue connecting wings 3 and 4 (Archives ACT 2025).

Physical condition

The surviving sections of the Cameron Offices remain structurally sound but exhibit evidence of their age and historical maintenance issues. Long-standing water ingress problems led to major remedial works in the late 1980s, including roofing over the former rooftop terraces and tennis courts. Despite this, the concrete fabric generally remains robust, and adaptations undertaken since the early 2000s have stabilised many issues (Dimech 2006).

Overall, the remaining wings are in fair to good condition, retaining sufficient physical fabric to demonstrate their architectural and technical significance. The remaining wings are structurally intact. The reinforced concrete fabric, while weathered, remains stable, and the remaining landscaped courtyard continues to reflect elements of the original design intent. Overall, the surviving portions retain sufficient physical condition to demonstrate the architectural and technical significance of the complex (ACT Heritage Library 2026).

Provisional registration boundary



Image 10: Provisional registration boundary for Cameron Offices Wing 3 and Bridge, Wings 4 and 5 and Link

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