



ACT Heritage Council

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
HERITAGE REGISTER
Background information**

WESTRIDGE HOUSE

55 Banks Street

BLOCK 6 SECTION 4, YARRALUMLA

At its meeting of 23 September 2026, the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Westridge House was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Westridge House and grounds against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Preamble

Westridge House (also known as Tudor House) is located on lands that the Ngunnawal and other First Nations peoples have had connections to for many thousands of years.

It was built during the Federation and early Commonwealth phase of Canberra's development, when the Commonwealth Government relocated key national institutions and senior public officers to the new capital, including the Australian Forestry School.

It was acquired in 1975 by the CSIRO when the former Australian Forestry School precinct became the new CSIRO Division of Forest Research.

Westridge House 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 On 16 December 2025 the Commonwealth status was revoked.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

Westridge House is located on Banks Street, Yarralumla, on land historically known as Westridge, approximately 100 metres north of the former Australian Forestry School (AFS). The place occupies a large, landscaped allotment bounded by Banks Street to the east, the former CSIRO AFS precinct to the south, and the Royal Canberra Golf Club and Westbourne Woods to the west.

The setting places Westridge House within Canberra's historic forestry precinct and establishes a close physical and visual relationship between the residence, the former AFS, the Yarralumla Nursery and the surrounding arboretum and experimental plantings. Banks Street is a wide, tree-lined avenue characterised by large residential properties and open grassed verges, allowing the house to be viewed within a semi-open landscape context that reinforces its institutional origins and longstanding connection to the adjoining woodland setting.

Westridge House was designed by Harold Desbrowe Annear, an Australian Arts and Crafts architect of the time. The house represents early 20th century transitional style residential architecture and reflects Arts and Crafts ideals, interpreted with restraint. Transitional architecture is strongly shaped by Arts and Crafts ideas, including respect for hand-crafted materials; expression of structure (exposed rafters, beams, joinery); emphasis on human scale and domestic comfort; and a close relationship between house and garden. However, unlike pure Arts and Crafts buildings, transitional houses often adopt these ideas selectively and pragmatically.

This transitional period set the stage for modern suburban housing styles. The design incorporates elements of traditional domestic form with early modernist tendencies. The key architectural characteristics include:

- Fine proportions and symmetrical planning
- Simplified massing with restrained ornamentation
- High-quality craftsmanship and detailing
- Windows designed to slide into wall cavities, an innovative and refined domestic feature
- Domestic scale articulated with careful attention to detail rather than monumentality

The relationship between the house, garden, and adjacent woodland creates a distinctive composition that contributes to the character of this part of Yarralumla. The house sits within a generous, landscaped block that forms part of Canberra's historic forestry precinct. Key features include:

- A picturesque garden that frames the house
- A backdrop and continuation of Westbourne Woods
- Surrounding mature tree plantings, reinforcing the forestry context

Westridge House is also known as the 'Tudor House'. The name appears to have emerged during the mid-20th century, particularly when the building was adapted for administrative use after it ceased to function as the residence of the Principal of the AFS. This label reflects the popular association with the house's half-timbered upper storey, referencing English vernacular architecture. While the name 'Tudor House' is part of the building's historical usage and local memory, it is considered secondary to and distinct from the place's correct historical name and significance as Westridge House.

Westridge House is a 2-storey half-timbered and masonry residence with an asymmetric

hipped and gabled Marseille tile roof sloping steeply on one side. The half-timbered first floor is jettied over a white rendered masonry ground floor with battered corner buttresses. Parallel horizontal bands of windows lie within the timber strapwork above and punctuate the plain rendered masonry walls below, while the area above the porch projects and rests on timber brackets.

The design incorporates details characteristic of Harold Desbrowe Annear's domestic architecture, including flush doors; vertically sliding windows concealed within wall cavities; flyscreens that automatically cover window openings; chimney ventilation stacks flanking a central flue; and stepped forms to assist ventilation.

In plan, a central hall divides the ground floor into living and dining/kitchen zones connected by sliding doors, while the upper floor accommodates bedrooms and bathrooms. Circulation spaces are minimised to maximise living areas, with the living room occupying one side of the house and opening to the dining room across the rear. Several smaller rooms are attached to the kitchen and utility area in the south-east corner. Notable features include a false wall and concealed room in an upstairs bedroom, an element found in other Annear designs, and an unusual bow in the outer wall of the living room that draws attention to the chimney, a motif also used at the Ince House in Melbourne, the architect's final residential design.

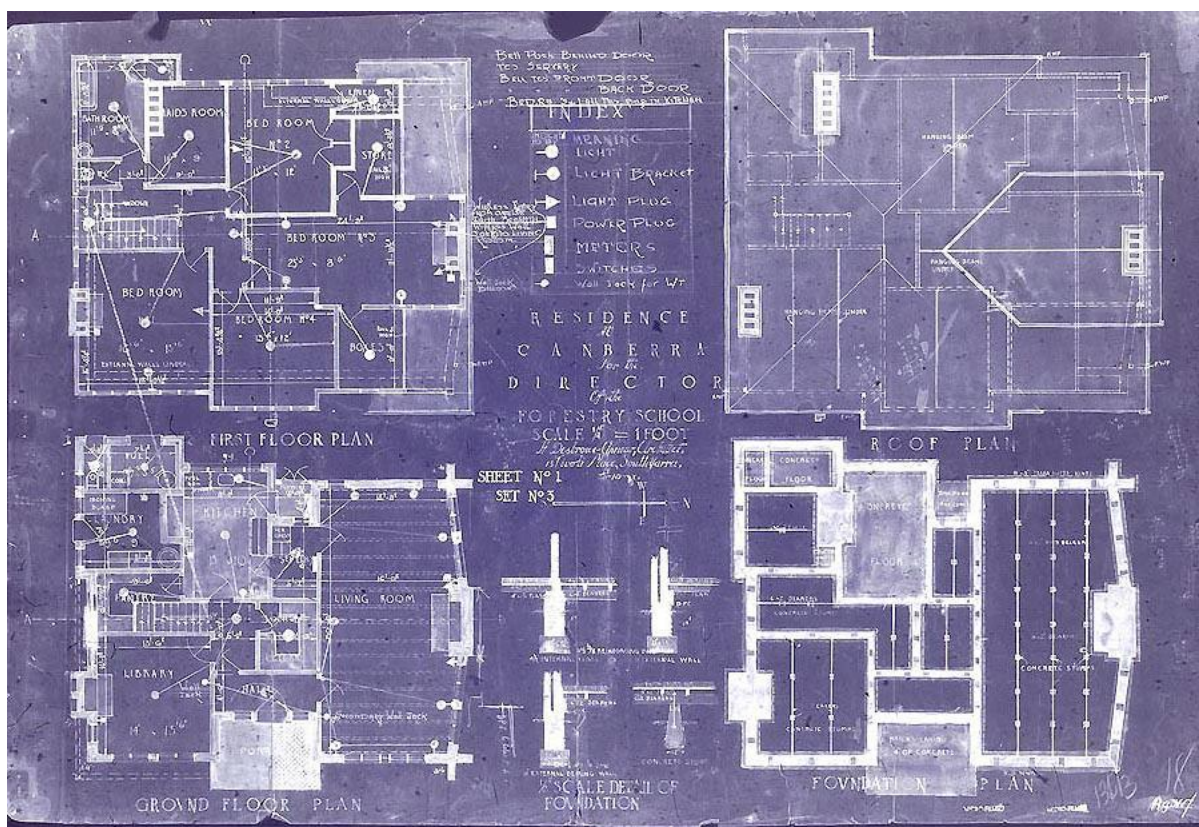


Image 1: Floor plan, 'Residence at Canberra for the Director of the Forestry School', H Desbrowe-Annear Architect, (NAA n.d.a)

History

The area historically known as Westridge formed part of the early federally controlled landscape developed following Canberra's selection as the national capital in 1908. The locality was closely associated with early Commonwealth infrastructure, including the Yarralumla Brickworks, the associated narrow-gauge goods railway, and the establishment of the Yarralumla Nursery, which from 1913 played a key role in supplying and testing plant species for the emerging capital.

From 1914, extensive tree plantings were undertaken in what became Westbourne Woods, under the direction of horticulturalist T.C.G. Weston, as part of Canberra's afforestation and experimental planting program. These plantings formed the basis of Canberra's earliest arboretum and provided the environmental and scientific context for later forestry education and research in the precinct.

The decision to establish a national forestry school in Canberra was made in 1925, following strong advocacy by Charles Edward Lane Poole, then Commonwealth Forestry Adviser. The site at Westridge was selected due to its proximity to the arboretum and nursery, providing immediate access to diverse tree species for teaching, experimentation and research. The AFS began operating at the Adelaide University in 1926 while facilities were constructed at Westridge and formally opened in Canberra in 1927.

The AFS played a nationally important educational role in Canberra as Australia's principal institution for professional forestry training between 1927 and 1965. AFS played a major role in developing Australia's professional forestry and conservation expertise. Closely connected to the forestry industry, AFS was established partly to meet the industry's professional workforce needs in the development of the new Capital.

A residence for the Principal of the AFS was included in the original institutional planning. Westridge House was designed in 1927 by Melbourne architect Harold Desbrowe Annear, selected personally by Charles and Ruth Lane Poole, and completed in 1928. The house was occupied by the Lane Poole family from 1928 to 1944 and later by Dr Max Jacobs, Principal of the AFS and a key figure in Australian forestry research and administration until 1961.

The house and its grounds functioned as an integral component of the forestry precinct rather than as an isolated domestic property. The surrounding landscape was deliberately informal, consisting of lawns, driveway, and forestry-related plantings that mediated between the residence, the AFS and Westbourne Woods. Over time, the broader precinct accommodated additional forestry research, administration and educational functions under the Forestry and Timber Bureau and later the CSIRO, which acquired the site in 1975.

Following the transfer of forestry education to the Australian National University in 1965 and subsequent institutional changes, Westridge House was adapted for administrative use and later returned to residential use. Despite these changes, the place remains closely tied to the wider forestry precinct, development of forestry education, research and administration in Canberra, and to the early federal capital's institutional planning.

Westridge House

Westridge House was built during the Federation and early Commonwealth phase of Canberra's development, when the Commonwealth Government relocated key national institutions and senior public officers to the new capital. The site for the residence, approximately 100 metres north of the AFS, was chosen during 1926 while the AFS building was under construction.

The house was constructed in 1927–1928 as the official residence of the Principal AFS. Immediately north of the AFS and adjoining Westbourne Woods are the arboretum and forestry plantings, which were established from 1914 under the direction of Thomas Charles George Weston.



Image 2: The newly completed Westridge House, Charles Mildenhall 1928 (NAA n.d.b)

The siting of Westridge House was influenced by both practical and aesthetic considerations, including the presence of established tree plantings and the opportunity to connect the residence visually and physically with the surrounding forestry landscape. Construction was undertaken by the Federal Capital Commission's day labour workforce. Although a maximum construction budget was initially imposed, revisions to drawings and additional works during construction resulted in increased costs prior to completion.

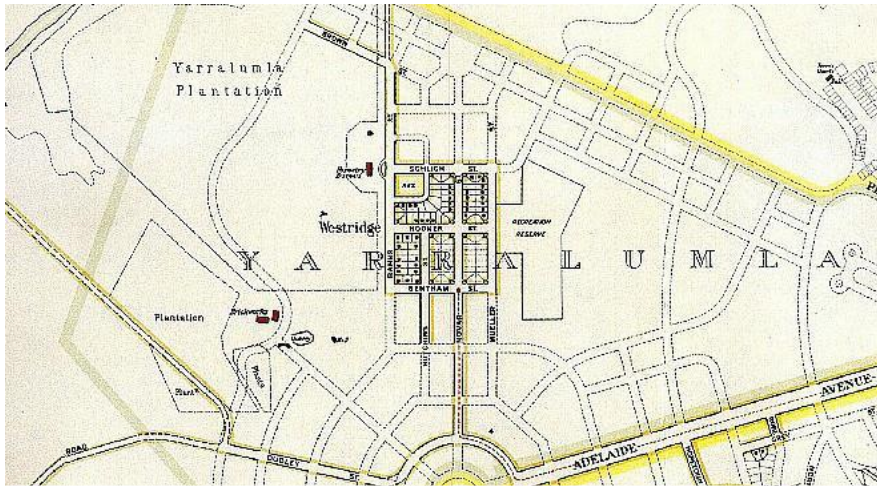


Image 3: The AFS campus in 1933, from plan of Canberra of that year. Note that the Forestry School precinct is limited to the area around the AFS and Westridge House (NLA 1987)

The garage, originally constructed shortly after completion of the house in 1928, formed part of the original domestic complex and has been expanded and rebuilt over time to meet changing functional needs.

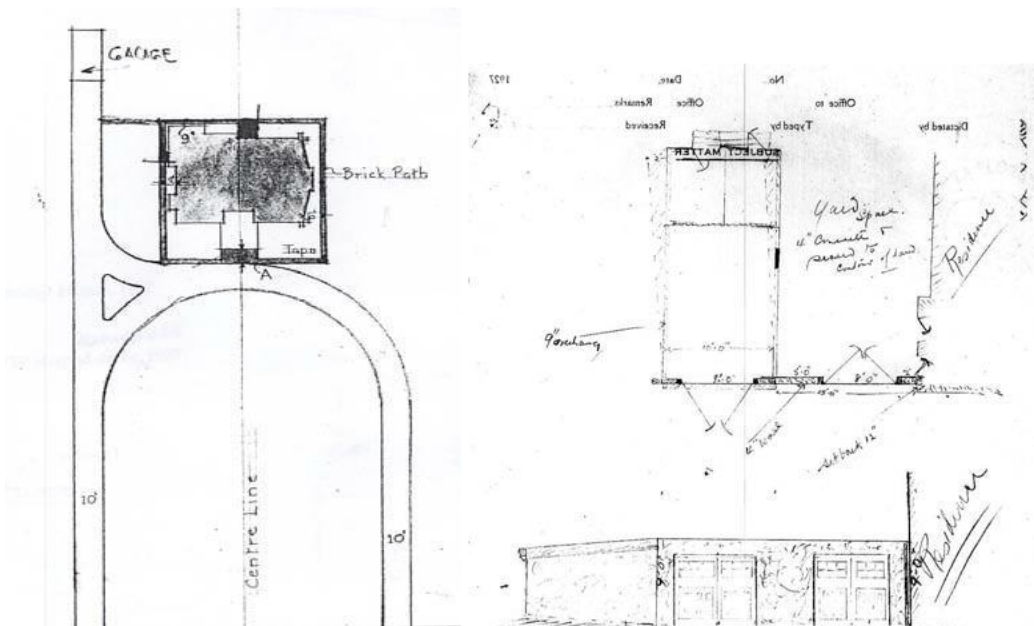


Image 4: Original sketches, garage & service yard, 1927 (NAA n.d.c)

Garden and setting



Image 5: Gardens and residence Westridge House, Yarralumla 1929 (Mildenhall's Canberra n.d.)

The landscape was established at public expense, with responsibility for maintenance placed on the occupant. The original layout combined formal and informal elements, characteristic of early Canberra institutional residences. A curved entry driveway from Banks Street defined the approach to the house and created a degree of separation from the street. Lawns extended around the house, providing open space and reinforcing the domestic scale of the building.

Plantings around Westridge House reflected its forestry context. Trees were used as dominant structural elements, visually linking the garden to the broader arboretum and plantation landscape of Westbourne Woods. The house was framed by informal tree groupings, allowing views to and from the building and reinforcing its relationship with the surrounding institutional landscape.

Unlike Garden City residential allotments elsewhere in Canberra, the Westridge House grounds functioned as a transitional landscape between domestic space and experimental forestry land, reinforcing the role of the house within the AFS precinct. The grounds were also used informally in connection with the school, including demonstration plantings and later small-scale research and observation activities.

Occupation by the Lane Poole and Jacobs families

The house was first occupied in 1928 by Charles and Ruth Lane Poole and their family. Charles Lane Poole served as Acting Principal of the AFS from its opening in 1927 until his retirement in 1944 and concurrently held senior roles in Commonwealth forestry administration. During this period, Westridge House was both a private residence and a place closely associated with the professional and social life of early Canberra.

Ruth Lane Poole was a highly regarded interior designer, craft practitioner and writer, active in Australia during the interwar period. Trained in Arts and Crafts traditions, she published widely on domestic interiors and furnishing and was a regular contributor to *Australian Home Beautiful*. In 1926–1927 she was engaged to furnish both The Lodge and the Governor-General’s residence and played a significant role in shaping early domestic interiors in the national capital.

Her influence extended to Westridge House, where interior planning and furnishing reflected contemporary Arts and Crafts principles. She selected the original colours for the house. The relationship between the house interior and the outside was consistent with her emphasis on functional, well-lit living spaces and views to the surrounding landscape.

Following Charles Lane Poole’s retirement, Dr Maxwell Ralph Jacobs became Principal of the AFS and occupied Westridge House from 1944 to 1961. Jacobs later became Director-General of the Forestry and Timber Bureau. During this period, the house and grounds continued to function as a principal’s residence closely connected to forestry education and research, with the garden maintaining its informal, arboretum-related character.

Non-residential use after 1961

After 1961, Westridge House ceased to be used as a principal’s residence and was adapted for administrative and office use by the Australian Forestry and Timber Bureau and later Commonwealth agencies. Some internal alterations were made to suit office functions. A fire occurred during this period, damaging parts of the building, including the staircase, which was replaced. The house became informally known as ‘Tudor House’ during this phase.

In 1975, the AFS precinct, including Westridge House, was acquired by the CSIRO. From 1980 to 1992, Westridge House was occupied by the CSIRO National Bushfire Research Unit. Throughout this period, the garden and grounds remained largely intact in layout, although maintenance practices and vegetation management reflected changing institutional requirements.

From the late 1990s, conservation planning supported the return of Westridge House to residential use, including works undertaken for the CSIRO Chief Executive between 2000 and 2009. In 2002, the surrounding CSIRO precinct was sold and leased back, while Westridge House and its immediate curtilage continued to be managed under Commonwealth heritage controls. Around this time renovations to the dwelling were made including replacement of roof tiles.

Between 2010 and 2016, the house was occupied by Dr John Flynn and additional site works were undertaken, including the construction of a larger garage, carport, lift, modifications to access, and landscaping.

Integrity

At the time of assessment Westridge House retains a high degree of integrity in its original form, design, fabric and associative values. The principal building remains substantially intact, with its characteristic two-storey massing, half-timbered upper level, rendered masonry ground floor, asymmetric hipped and gabled Marseille tile roof, chimneys and fenestration clearly visible. Key architectural elements integral to the original design—including vertically sliding windows designed to retract into wall cavities, chimney ventilation stacks and stepped ventilation forms—survive and allow the original design intent of architect Harold Desbrowe Annear to be readily understood.

A substantial rear extension was added to Westridge House during the CSIRO period after the property became the residence of the organisation's chief officer. The extension was designed to provide additional residential accommodation and modern amenities while retaining the prominence of Harold Desbrowe Annear's 1927 Arts and Crafts-inspired residence (EMAA 2025). Located to the rear of the original house, the addition was deliberately sited to minimise its visual impact on the principal façades and formal approach to the building.

The extension reflects the continuing evolution of Westridge House from the residence of the Principal of the Australian Forestry School to a residence associated with senior CSIRO leadership, illustrating the site's ongoing role within Australia's forestry and scientific research institutions. The extension forms a tangible part of the building's CSIRO history and demonstrates the Federal government's adaptation for successive institutional uses, while the heritage significance of the place remains principally associated with the 1927 residence, its setting, and its links to the Australian Forestry School, Charles Lane-Poole, and the forestry precinct at Yarralumla.

Based on reviews of recent real estate images, the internal layout retains strong integrity. The central hall plan, principal living spaces and relationships between rooms remain largely intact despite periods of adaptive reuse. Alterations undertaken during office use and later residential occupation have generally respected the original planning or are reversible, ensuring that the house's original domestic arrangement remains evident.



Image 6: Despite some modifications for adaptive reuse, original features including fireplace, doors, ceiling and windows are evident (Realestate.com.au n.d.)

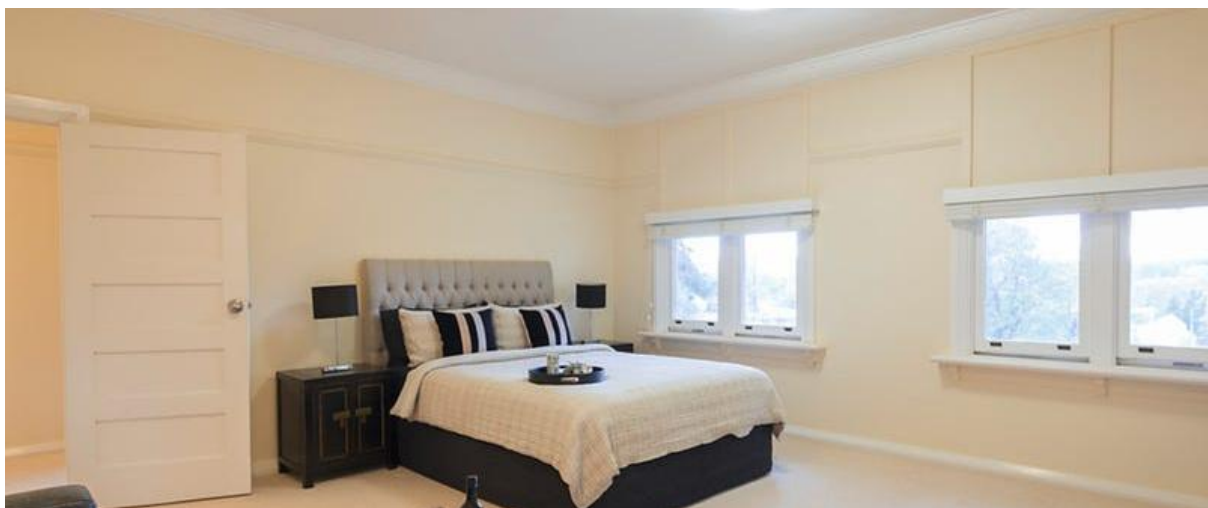


Image 7: Desbrowe Annear's sash windows have been retained and maintained (Realestate.com.au n.d.)

The garden and grounds retain moderate integrity in overall layout, scale and relationship to the house and surrounding landscape. Although individual plantings have changed over time and tree coverage has been reduced, the essential characteristics of an open, informal setting with lawns framed with tree plantings, and strong visual connections to Westbourne Woods and the former AFS, remain evident. The curved driveway alignment, open

presentation to Banks Street and the transitional character of the landscape between domestic residence and institutional forestry land continue to express the original siting and intent.

The garage forms part of the original domestic complex, though it has been modified and expanded over time. Later garage structures and associated outbuildings are identifiable as subsequent additions and are of lower heritage significance than the original house. Their presence does not obscure or diminish the understanding of the principal residence or its historical setting.

Physical condition

The physical condition of Westridge House is generally good. The exterior fabric, including roof, walls, chimneys and fenestration, is sound and well maintained, with no evidence of major structural failure. Original architectural features such as sliding window mechanisms remain functional and in good condition. Earlier internal alterations associated with periods of office use, a fire event and subsequent repairs have been addressed through later conservation and adaptation works. These changes have not resulted in widespread fabric loss, and the condition of significant original elements remains stable.

The garden and grounds are in fair to good condition. Lawns, trees and broader landscape elements are generally maintained, although vegetation condition varies across the site. Some loss of canopy cover and changes to understorey plantings have occurred over time.

The garage and later outbuildings are largely modern in fabric and finishes. While they meet contemporary residential requirements, these structures are of lesser heritage interest compared to the original house and contribute primarily at a functional rather than heritage level.



Image 8: Westridge House (EMAA 2025)

Provisional registration boundary



Figure 1: Provisional registration boundary

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