
OLD TOTE/FIG TREE THEATRE (UNSW)

Heritage Conservation Area

A group of buildings which date from the use of the site as Kensington Racecourse. The Fig Tree Theatre building has also been used as immigration barracks and the home of NIDA.

The Old Tote/Fig Tree Theatre Conservation Area is on the south side of High Street, within the campus of the University of NSW. It includes three buildings which pre-date the foundation of the University, the Fig Tree Theatre, the White House and the Old Tote.

What is the area's significance?

Aesthetic Significance:

The precinct's three period buildings are situated in an open space, surrounded by large fig trees and other campus buildings. The orientation of the Fig Tree Theatre and the White House, diagonal to the standard north/south building grid, identifies them as earlier structures. The orientation is also aesthetically distinctive. The space which is formed by the trees and the three buildings has visual qualities which are rare on the university campus. This quality is created by the traditional gabled and verandahed building forms, nestled between the larger masses of the fig trees.

The White House and the Old Tote have considerable individual aesthetic significance as rare examples of early Federation racecourse buildings. The design and detail of the White House verandah is outstanding.

The row of fig trees leading from the High Street entry gate, is an important point of arrival and orientation for the university campus.

Historic Significance:

The White House, the Old Tote and the fig trees have historical significance as surviving evidence of the use of the university site as Kensington Racecourse, from 1893 to 1941. The orientation and location of the buildings and trees remain indicative of the layout of the racecourse.

The Fig Tree Theatre also provides evidence of the use of the site as an immigration barracks in the late 1940s.

The theatre was the original home of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) prior to its relocation to the western side of Anzac Parade.

Social Significance:

The conservation area has social significance for the university and the wider community. It provides evidence of the historical continuity of human occupation and use of the site, which is absent in other parts of the campus.

Themes Represented:

The following historical themes, identified in the 1989 Randwick Heritage Study, are directly illustrated in the conservation area:

- Promotion of culture, religion and education
- Recreation, entertainment and leisure

The following themes are indirectly represented:

- Modifying the landscape
- Government and institutions

