
WEST KENSINGTON

Heritage Conservation Area

Highly consistent early twentieth century streetscapes with an unusual triangular street layout.

A large area of land generally bounded by Dowling Street to the west, Todman Avenue to the north, and the Australian Golf Course to the south.

What is the area's significance?

Aesthetic Significance:

The West Kensington heritage conservation area is significant for its highly consistent early twentieth century streetscapes. The unusual triangular street layout, overlaid on a former water supply catchment, has produced a unique subdivision pattern. It features interesting street junctions, many of which are T-junctions, and streets which range in length. This results in a great variety of internal vistas, long and short, most of which are terminated by buildings at an intersection or bend. Some of the more interesting views out include views to the elevated areas to the south-east, where the Sacred Heart Church still stands.

The area's visual interest is mostly a consequence of built character, and the geometry of the subdivision, with all allotments orientated at 45 degrees to the main compass points. The landscape remains predominantly flat, though there are a few notable variations in level. Street planting is variable, but there is a particularly notable street tree canopy in Milroy Avenue.

The heritage character of the area largely derives from its Federation and Inter-War housing, its predominantly single storey scale, the originally consistent face brick construction, and the highly visible tiled and slated roofs. Whilst many buildings have been substantially altered, there has been very little redevelopment relative to other parts of Randwick. Most buildings and streetscapes still retain their essential period character.

Social and Historical Significance:

The area has historical interest for its early importance as a water catchment, the boundaries of which expanded beyond those of the conservation area. This delayed its development, as did subsequent speculation and the 1890s recession. The eventual and long-awaited release in 1912 saw it develop relatively quickly. The area was almost fully settled within 15 to 20 years. The consistency of the area is strengthened by its being almost wholly residential. Commercial intrusions are minimal.

The area has important historical associations with early industries established on the Lachlan Stream.

The development of the area also has interest for its historical and physical associations with the former tobacco factory on the eastern side of Todman Avenue. The original developer of the West Kensington Estate, George Frederick Todman, was one of the founders of the factory. There was also a later association with the glass manufacturer, AGM, which had a factory nearby on South Dowling Street. There is a fine group of Inter-War buildings on Todman Avenue which was purpose built for employees of AGM. The area also has interest for its association with the local racing industry. A number of horse stables in the area are still in use, some of them quite old.

The housing (Federation/Inter-War) is representative of the second stage of Kensington's suburban development, after the Doncaster Avenue / Anzac Parade precinct (Victorian/Federation) and prior to South Kensington (Inter-War). The unusual triangular street layout was probably a simple response to the shape of the residue parcel of the former water catchment, retained by Todman after the collapse of the earlier speculative joint venture for the wider area. It was as close as the area came to the original grand town planning vision for Kensington.

Themes Represented:

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

- modifying the landscape
- speculation and promotion
- suburban action

The following themes are indirectly represented:

- industry and commerce
- transport and communications

