

# Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

**RSTCA No:** R114

**Name of Place:** Canberra National Seventh Day Adventist Church

**Other/Former Names:**

**Address/Location:** 3 Macleay Street TURNER ACT 2612

Block 9 Section 38 of Turner

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Listing Status:		Other Heritage Listings:	
Date of Listing:		Level of Significance:	
Citation Revision No:		Category:	Religious
Citation Revision Date:		Style:	Ecclesiastical

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Date of Design:	1967	Designer:	(Ancher Mortlock & Woolley) Ken Woolley
Construction Period:	1971	Client/Owner/Lessee:	Seventh Day Adventists
Date of Additions:	2001	Builder:	

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## Statement of Significance

The Seventh Day Adventist Church, Turner designed by Ken Woolley of Ancher Mortlock & Woolley, is of architectural significance as a good example of the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) with its traditional rectangular plan shape, use of familiar materials (brick and timber), plain wall surfaces, unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality, and glazing with vertically proportioned panes.

Ken Woolley was a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960- ) and key elements of the style are exhibited in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. These include asymmetrical massing, clerestory windows providing high natural light, long thin vertical timber-framed windows, painted brick walling, skillion roof form, natural textures and colours with contrasts of white-painted surfaces, and little concern for the facade as a presentation front.

The design of the church combines concepts in contemporary church architecture with a symbolic design which reflects the beliefs of the SDA congregation. The building is a significant architectural expression of the liturgy of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The church was designed to reflect key elements of the church's doctrine. The use of light and water highlight key elements of the doctrine. The dramatic use of light in the interior space highlights the symbolic functions. Light falls from the high windows; reflects into the church from the pool outside the church; is focused through the baptismal font; and is emphasised by the white of the walls.

The building appears to rise out of the water, as the buttresses rise out of the water in the courtyard pool. Each person entering the church symbolically walks in under the level of the water in the pool. The reflective pool softens the internal light as well as mediating between the internal and external spaces.

The prominent and unusual baptismal font highlights the key role of baptism by immersion in the church. The baptismal font focuses light from outside the church down onto the immersion font, which is sunken to symbolise immersion.

In 1996 the church was awarded the ACT Chapter of the RAIA Twenty Five Year Award in recognition of the architectural significance of the building when designed and that the building has continued, over the twenty five year period to demonstrate its architectural qualities.

The architecture of the church may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of the development of church architecture as well as their understanding of the development of Late Twentieth-Century architectural styles.

Ancher Mortlock & Woolley are recognised as one of Australia's leading architectural firms of the late twentieth century. Ken Woolley is one of Australia's great designers and has been awarded the RAIAs Gold Medal for his lifetime contribution to architecture. The SDA church is a significant example of his work in the partnership of Ancher Mortlock and Woolley.

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## **Description**

The National Seventh Day Adventist Church was designed by Ken Woolley of Ancher Mortlock & Woolley for the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The design process began in 1967 and construction was completed in 1971. The building is an example of the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) with its traditional rectangular plan shape, use of familiar materials (brick, timber), plain wall surface, unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality, and glazing with vertically proportioned panes.

Another example of this style in Canberra is the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (1961), Grounds Romberg and Boyd located adjacent to the SDA Church. These buildings can be compared and contrasted. They both have a distinctive design whilst responding to the needs of the liturgy, and they share the unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality and the glazing with vertical proportioned panes. In contrast, the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church incorporates the more traditional spire, and is of a domestic scale and character.

The SDA church also exhibits a number of key architectural features of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-). These include asymmetrical massing, clerestory windows, long thin vertical timber framed windows, high natural light, painted brick walling, skillion roof form, textures and colours generally natural, with contrasts of white-painted surfaces, and little concern for the façade as a presentation front. Another example of this style in Canberra is the RAIAs Headquarters, Red Hill, ACT (1976).

The Seventh Day Adventist Church forms part of a complex around a forecourt fronting Macleay Street. The complex consisting of the church, an interlocking building with service and meeting areas and the church hall.

The church is a simple triangular prism of brick, with the whole roof rising on massive buttresses from a pool in the forecourt. It is constructed of loadbearing red brown Bowral bricks, with a roll-formed brown coloured steel decking roof at a 45 degree pitch towards the internal courtyard. To Gould Street it presents as a high plain brick wall with a small projection at ground level at the north west end with vertically proportioned clerestory windows located high up the wall. Fronting Macleay Street it has a plain brick facade. Facing the internal courtyard the church displays a brown steel decked roof at 45 degree pitch leading straight onto long thin vertical glass windows with brown painted timber joinery looking onto the pool. Doors and window joinery are painted western red cedar. The church is 441 square metres in area.

The church is entered from the south east through doors facing onto the courtyard and pool which lead into a partitioned-off entry foyer. A small crying room is located at the end of the entry foyer. The internal bricks are rendered and painted white and carpet is laid on timber boarding. The floor slopes downwards towards the rostrum. The nave has Mountain Ash timber pews running on both sides of the aisle with heating under the pews.

The lighting in the church consists of five large 1970s white plastic bulb light shades hanging from long cords from the ceiling and six small round white light shades attached to the wall. The rostrum is spotlighted. The windows have blinds to allow the light to be reduced. The concrete pulpit is located on the raised rostrum at the front of the church. The choir gallery is located to the north west of the rostrum and the baptistery to the north east. The choir gallery is located in the small area which projects out from the main building and has concealed windows.

The Baptism font is an unusual design, being a circular architectural element hanging from the ceiling channelling light down into the church from a skylight. Immediately underneath in the

rostrum is the immersion font, a matching large circular hole with stairs leading down into it. Behind the baptistry are changing rooms, and the Elders and Deacon's rooms.

Outside the church but visible from within is a pool decorated with a small number of rocks and a bird sculpture. The light on the water reflects into the church. The floor of the church is lower than the water level in the pool and people entering the church walk below the level of the water in the pool.

A link building runs from the church to the church hall and provides meeting rooms and service rooms including a children's room or Sabbath school, junior school, toilets, and kitchen and large corridor which faces towards the pool with full length thin vertical glass windows, matching those to the church. It has a built up flat roof, white painted plaster board and stained western red cedar timber details.

The complex was originally a 'U' shape, however the middle of the 'U' which was originally an outside entry porch was extended in 2001 in a style matching the link building with flat roof and large vertical windows, to provide a youth hall.

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### **Condition and Integrity**

The church is well maintained and in good condition. The church interior was renovated in 1993 with new carpet, blinds, fans, gas heating and new sound system installed. The seats to the choir have been removed and the pews re-finished. Rocks and a bird sculpture have been added to the pool. The link building had a new metal deck roof in 1997. In 1998 the kitchen in the link was renovated.

In 2001 an extension to the link building into the courtyard was undertaken. The extension matched the design of the link building with flat roof and large vertical windows to provide a youth hall.

The church was awarded the RAI A Twenty Five Year Award in 1996 by the RAI A ACT Chapter in recognition of the architectural significance of the building when designed and that the building has continued, over the twenty five year period to demonstrate its architectural qualities.

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### **Background/History**

#### ***Ancher Mortlock and Woolley***

Sydney Ancher, the firm's founder, took Bryce Mortlock and Stuart Murray into partnership in 1952. Ken Woolley joined the firm in 1964 and it was known as Ancher Mortlock Murray and Woolley prior to Murray's departure.

#### ***Ken Woolley***

Ken Woolley (b.1933) studied architecture at Sydney University. Following his degree he travelled to Europe and worked for Chamberlin Powell and Bon in England, he visited Finland and France and viewed the work of Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and Mies van der Rohe. On his return to Australia he worked in Harry Rembert's office at NSW Government Architects Office where he worked on the design of the Fisher Library, University of Sydney (1962) with T.E. O'Mahoney; the NSW State Government Office Block (1964) (now demolished); and the Chapel and Sister's Home, St Margaret's Hospital (1955-58).

In 1964, at the age of 32, Woolley joined the office of Sydney Ancher, Bryce Mortlock and Stuart Murray, just before Ancher's retirement. Within 18 months the firm had grown from 8 to 60 staff—working on the Pettit and Seviitt project houses (which Woolley had earlier begun), the tumbling penthouses (inspired by Italian hill towns) at Darling Point, and the P.C. Pye Field Environment Laboratory, Black Mountain, Canberra, for CSIRO (1965-66). The new partners created a shift in the firm's architectural designs, with the emphasis moving to natural materials and craft as opposed to Ancher's focus on a white geometric style.

Aside from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Woolley has undertaken a number of projects in Canberra including the Phillip Health Centre and Library, Woden Town Centre (1972/75) for the NCDC, Yarralumla Shores housing (1983), Australian Defence Forces Academy Cadets Mess (1985) with Department of Housing and Construction, and the Australia Hellenic War Memorial (1987), Anzac Parade, Canberra for the NCA. The firm also designed the RAI Headquaters Building, Mugga Way, Red Hill, Canberra (Woolley, Murray and Mortlock 1976) and the Northbourne Avenue Housing, Canberra (1963) by Ancher and Murray.

In Australia there are many notable buildings designed by Woolley, they include Woolley House, Mosman (1963), Park Hyatt Hotel, Sydney (1989), ABC Radio Centre, Ultimo, Sydney (1992).

Woolley designs buildings in response to the site and client requirements. His use of materials alternates between dominant concrete or brick, and more recently timber and corrugated iron. He was awarded the RAI Gold Medal in 1993. Haig Beck noted: "In making sense of the different architectural sensibilities that were burgeoning in the wake of modernism, Woolley was less interested in forming a personal style or defining himself architecturally in terms of any reductionist cannon; he was more interested in the realisation that different approaches to construction called for different detailing. He was much later to define this undogmatic predilection as 'appropriateness': choosing the right mode for the job".

As Jennifer Taylor notes "While there are constant themes in Woolley's architecture, rarely are there evident visual affiliations across the spectrum of work; the buildings are always particular to site and program".

### ***National Seventh Day Adventist Church, Turner***

In the early 1950s the Canberra Seventh Day Adventist Church consisted of 18 charter members meeting in various places. In November 1958 with a membership of around 50, a building was opened and dedicated as the church building (now the church hall). During the 1960s the church membership grew to around 170, and in 1969 the Woden SDA church was formed.

In the late 1960s the SDA's formed a building and finance committee to look into the need for a new church building with meeting and service rooms. Ken Woolley of Ancher Mortlock and Woolley.

The existing late 1950s building which they had been using as a church was to be retained as the church hall. Woolley researched the basic beliefs of the SDA Church and was provided with a brief, by the building committee, which outlined the needs of the Church based on a typical Sabbath morning service. Woolley prepared plans for the church and in May 1970, with some changes suggested by the building committee, it was agreed to proceed based on the final sketch plans and model.

The SDA church has similarities to other Woolley designed buildings particularly Woolley House, Mosman, Sydney (1961/2), RAI Headquaters, Red Hill, ACT (1976), and the University of Newcastle Student Union (1964-70).

The design of the church combines concepts in contemporary church architecture with a symbolic design that reflects the beliefs of the SDA congregation. The design is influenced by a number of considerations: the site and its context; the requirements of the congregation; and current trends in architecture and specifically modern church architecture. The design has in part been influenced by the material and form of the 1950s building which it replaced. It uses the colour of the red brown bricks, and its design reflects in part, and on a larger scale, the roof line of half of the earlier church building, using the same angle but to a greater height.

The high plain brick wall with windows at the top, facing Gould Street served a number of purposes. It presented a design to Gould Street which does not compete with or overpower the next door Lutheran Church, the wall focuses the attention around the corner to the front of the SDA church on Macleay Street, and the high wall served the aesthetic, practical and symbolic purpose of providing light from above. The design created an inward-looking group of buildings with space for people to gather inside and outside, with a protected courtyard.

The design of the church is also based on and inspired by the SDA doctrine and the absence of much ritual in the service. The liturgy emphasises baptism (focussed on immersion), preaching, singing and discussion. The interior of the church is white, reflecting purity and providing the church with plenty of light. The familiar cross is avoided in the design but can be seen in the form of the Pulpit.

Baptism is a key element of the SDA doctrine and baptism is given a prominent position in the design of the church. Woolley emphasised this ritual with the prominent baptismal structure, with a light from above, and the immersion font below. The building itself can be seen as rising out of the water, with the church buttresses rising out of the pool of water in the courtyard. Each person entering the church also symbolically walks in under the level of the water in the pool.

The pool itself provides an interesting moving light reflection on the ceiling of the church. The reflective pool softens the internal light as well as mediating between the internal and external spaces. The dramatic use of light in the interior space highlighting its symbolic functions.

The simple landscape treatment accepted the existing landscape of wide lawns and rows of deciduous trees. A few plane trees are located to Macleay Street.

The church was officially opened and dedicated on 27 November 1971. A plaque marking the opening is located in the church entrance foyer.

In 1989 landscaping to Gould Street was undertaken with a number of trees being planted. In 1993 the church interior was renovated with new carpet, blinds, fans, gas heating and new sound system installed. The seats to the choir were removed and the pews re-finished. Rocks and the bird sculpture have been added to the pool. The link building had a new metal deck roof in 1997. In 1998 the kitchen was renovated.

The NSDA Church, Turner was awarded the ACT Chapter of the RAIA Twenty Five Year Award 1996 in recognition of the architectural significance of the building when designed and that the building has continued, over the twenty five year period to demonstrate its architectural qualities.

In 2001 the link building was extended, in a style to match its design to provide a youth hall. In 2001 the church membership is around 250.

### ***Comparative Analysis***

The SDA church is comparable to the Wentworth Memorial Church, Vaucluse designed by Clarke, Gazzard and Partners (1955) which is located on a rocky hillock and features high white painted brick walls with high natural light. The SDA church also relates to the Sir Shirley Jeffries Memorial Methodist Chapel Westminster School, Alison Avenue, Marion, South Australia by Hassell, McConnell & Partners, architects, (1967), which is a traditional rectangular plan given prominence by a tall structural frame of steel.

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### **Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991**

*(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time*

*(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group*

The Seventh Day Adventist Church exhibits particular architectural elements specific to the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) and the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-).

The main architectural elements that are specific to the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) are the: traditional rectangular plan shape, use of familiar materials (brick and timber), plain wall surface, unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality, and glazing with vertically proportioned panes.

Ken Woolley was a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-) style and the key elements of the style exhibited in the SDA church are the: asymmetrical massing, clerestory windows, long thin timber-framed windows, high natural light, skillion roof form, textures and colours generally natural or neutral, with contrasts of white-painted surfaces, and little concern for the facade as a presentation front.

Other notable similarly designed church include the Wentworth Memorial Church, Vaucluse designed by Clarke, Gazzard and Partners (1955) and the Sir Shirley Jeffries Memorial Methodist Chapel Westminster School, Marion, South Australia by Hassell, McConnell & Partners, architects (1967).

The design of the SDA church has been influenced by a number of considerations: the site and its context; the requirements of the congregation; and current trends in architecture and specifically modern church architecture.

The church was designed to meet the needs of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and certain design features incorporated in the church have symbolic importance. The church design was in part inspired by Seventh Day Adventist doctrine. The liturgy emphasises baptism (focused on immersion), preaching, singing and discussion and these elements have been incorporated in the design. The dramatic use of light in the building modulates the interior space highlighting its symbolic functions. Light falls from the high windows, is reflected into the church by the pool of water outside the long church windows, and the white of the walls emphasises the light. The prominent baptismal font highlights the key role of baptism by immersion in the church.

The whole building appears to be rising out of the water, as the church buttresses rise out of the pool of water in the courtyard. Each person entering the church symbolically walks in under the level of the water in the pool. The reflective pool softens the internal light as well as mediating between the internal and external spaces.

The church was awarded the ACT Chapter of the RAI A Twenty Five Year Award 1996 in recognition of the architectural significance of the building when designed and that the building has continued, over the twenty five year period to demonstrate its architectural qualities.

*(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest*

*(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations*

The building is highly valued by the architectural and the Seventh Day Adventist community as a significant architectural expression of the liturgy of the church.

*(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type*

*(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class*

The Seventh Day Adventist Church exhibits a number of principal characteristics specific to the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) with its traditional rectangular plan shape, use of familiar materials (brick and timber), plain wall surface, unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality, and glazing with vertically proportioned panes.

Ken Woolley was a key practitioner of the Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional style (1960-) and key elements of the style are incorporated in the SDA church. These are: asymmetrical massing, clerestory windows, long thin timber framed windows, high natural light, skillion roof form, textures and colours generally natural or neutral, with contrasts of white-painted surfaces, and little concern for the façade as a presentation front.

*(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history*

Ancher Mortlock & Woolley are recognised as one of Australia's leading architectural firms of the late twentieth century. Ken Woolley is one of Australia's great designers of the last 40 years and has been awarded the RAIA's Gold Medal for his lifetime contribution to architecture. The SDA church is a significant example of his work in the partnership of Ancher Mortlock and Woolley.

*(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site*

The architecture of the church may contribute to the education of designers in their understanding of the development of church architecture as well as their understanding of the development of late twentieth-century architectural styles.

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### **References**

- 1 Apperly, R. Irving. R. & Reynolds, P. 'A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture' Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney 1989.
  - 2 Architecture Bulletin, "25-year award to Ken Woolley", November 1997.
  - 3 Christ-Janer, A. "Modern Church Architecture: a guide to the form and spirit of 20<sup>th</sup> century religious buildings", New York, McGraw Hill. 1962.
  - 4 Haig Beck in Architecture Australia, "Gold: Ken Woolley" Volume 82, No. 5, September/October 1993.
  - 5 Master architect series IV. 1999 "Ken Woolley and Ancher Mortlock and Woolley: selected and current works", Images Publishing Group, Mulgrave Victoria, Craftsman House.
  - 6 Taylor, J. 'Australian Architecture since 1960', The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, ACT, 1990.
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### **Other Information Sources**

- 1 Martin Poels Address by Martin Poels on 20 September 1997 on the occasion of the 25 year Award by RAIA.
  - 2 Martin Poels, conversation, July 2001.
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