

The Ways Terrace Workers' Housing Project

The Ways Terrace workers' housing project was the result of an architectural competition held by the Sydney Municipal Council in 1924 on a resumption site between Point and Mill Streets. It was one of four projects developed by the Council between 1914 and 1927 as a response to poor standards of workers' housing. The other three are the Strickland Building in Chippendale (1914), designed by the City Architect of Sydney, Robert Hargreave Brodrick; Dowling Street Flats in Woolloomooloo (1925), designed by Peddle & Thorp; and The Alexandra Group in Camperdown (1927), also design by City Architect of Sydney R. H. Brodrick.^[1]

The competition was won by Professor Leslie Wilkinson and Joseph Fowell. Their entry consisted of 41 apartments between Point Street and Ways Terrace, offset by 10 smaller buildings on the other side of Ways Terrace with about 38 apartments on the cliff line above Mill Street. The smaller buildings were never built. The larger building facing Point Street was completed in 1925 and survives.^[2]

Leslie Wilkinson was the first Professor of Architecture (1919-1947) at the University of Sydney and in Australia. Born in 1882 in London and educated at The Royal Academy, Wilkinson travelled widely as a young architect (often by bicycle) through England, Spain, France and Italy, studying (through drawing, measuring, sketching and photographing) cathedrals, colleges, piazzas, houses and townscapes. The quality of light and colour of the Mediterranean had a profound influence on his approach to architecture, especially in Australia with a climate like the Mediterranean.^[3]

The site of Ways Terraces is triangular, with a substantial level change to Point Street and within the site itself. Wilkinson's and Fowell's design consists of 5 buildings joined together with varying setbacks in response to the varying depth of the site and to reduce the perceived bulk of the building. These setbacks are also a key design strategy for the amenity of each apartment, allowing prospects and views from living spaces; light and air to all rooms including bathrooms, while maintaining privacy between apartments. The setbacks also form spaces for semi-private gardens of varying dimension for ground floor occupants as informal extensions of

their living space.

The rear of Ways Terrace face west, and receives the strongest sun in the hottest part of the day. It also affords one of the most spectacular prospects with views towards Millers Point and Sydney Harbour Bridge, whose construction was underway during the development of this project. This conflict between aspect and prospect was resolved by the use of loggias, covered and protruding balconies and timber shutters - practical architectural devices which Wilkinson studied in his Mediterranean travels.^[4]

One distinctive feature of the project is the “bridge-building” form over Ways Terrace, formerly Ways Lane, a public road on the site which was incorporated into the design.^[5] This bridge-building theme features with variations in some of Wilkinson’s later projects such as the Sydney University War Memorial Arch (1958) linking the Quadrangle with the Macleay Building over Science Road and the extension to Bishopscourt in Darling Point (1965).

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^[1] M. Zanardo, (2010). The Sydney Municipal Council Worker’ Dwellings 1914-1927: Four Typological Case Studies in Urban Affordable Housing

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] S. Falkiner, (1982). Leslies Wilkinson a Practical Idealist.

^[4] Ibid.

^[5] Town Hall Archives: Parish Map City of Sydney Sheet Y2, ML MSer4 811.17/1