

# *Camden Residents' Action Group*

*Incorporated*

*Camden – Still a Country Town*

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[heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au](mailto:heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au)  
cc CRAG committee

8 November 2017

Dear Heritage Council,

## **Re: Intention to Consider Listing St John's Anglican Church Precinct Camden NSW**

Further to our letter of 12 March 2017 supporting the nomination of St John's Church Precinct Camden, we are very pleased to express our absolute support for its state listing.

This Precinct, aesthetically intrinsic to the landscape and Camden's sense of place, is greatly valued by the community and visitors.

There is no doubt, as evidenced through impassioned responses from our members and in social and other media to the news of the intention of the Church to sell the glebe area and Rectory for potential development, that the community feels a very strong and special association with the Precinct. St John's precinct is a fixture in community life and has been since its inception, and the shocked responses leave no doubt that the community as a whole believe that the Precinct belongs to the people and must be conserved. As well as the Precinct's strong cultural and heritage significance in the story of European colonisation of Australia, many people have historical connections to St John's Church whether it is as Parishioners or through solemnisation of their life events.

Indeed the Macarthur family gifted the entirety of the Precinct to Camden and it is believed that it was never their intention, as borne out by wording in the original trust deeds, that the Church was entitled to use the gifts for purposes other than those stipulated.

In consultation with the community, Camden township's heritage, societal and cultural value was recognised by the Greater Sydney Commission in its original south west draft plan, published in November 2016<sup>1</sup>, which featured St John's Church on its cover page and specifically referred to the need to protect its heritage value and its setting. St John's Precinct is of course a most important and intrinsic component of this heritage value.

Importantly, the Conservation Management Plan<sup>2</sup> (and addendum<sup>3</sup>) for the Precinct provide professional extensive and detailed information on the heritage value of the Precinct. There is also ample evidence of the heritage significance of the Precinct in the now archived Register of the National Estate as there is for many items in the Camden township and Camden Local Government Area<sup>4</sup>.

Further an important legal precedent<sup>5</sup> was set in 1996 by the Land and Environment Court which judged against a proposed development within the town with the potential to impact upon the landscape setting of St John's Precinct, stating that

*"It is abundantly clear that the Camden Township represents a particularly significant and sensitive heritage site in which conservation, involving reuse of buildings or land, must necessarily be approached with considerable care."*

Furthermore and in particular, our knowledge of the significance of the St John's Precinct is supported by our research into the history of the township of Camden and analysis of the town's heritage significance<sup>6</sup> for its nomination for State listing in May 2016<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Replaced in October 2017 by a combined draft western city district plan

<sup>2</sup> Clive Lucas, Stapleton and Partners *St John's Anglican Church Precinct, Menangle Road, Camden CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN March 2004*

<sup>3</sup> NBRS and Partners *CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN ADDENDUM 2010 St John's Anglican Church Precinct, Menangle Road, Camden 15 December 2010*

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government *Department of Environment and Energy* Search available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl>

<sup>5</sup> Land and Environment Court (1996) *Gledhill Constructions Pty Limited V. The Council of Camden NSWLEC 120 (19 April 1996)* Available at: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/nsw/NSWLEC/1996/120.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=1996%20gledhill%20camden>

<sup>6</sup> CRAG Inc 2016 HERITAGE STUDY CAMDEN NEW SOUTH WALES: Documentary Evidence addressing criteria for statutory heritage listing April 2016 Available at <http://www.crag.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Camden-Heritage-Study-April-2016.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> State Heritage Register Nomination form for Camden township is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ty0wzdvj3hsgnzf/AACf8FA5GALiVBwkwTPCC5Bha?dl=0>

This study, which was corroborated by testimonials of eminent historians, brought together and provided overwhelming evidence that St John's Precinct is integral to and an important regional landmark within the deliberative picturesque landscape plan of the Macarthur family for Camden Park Estate and its privately founded Camden town.

We therefore, through our own detailed study, can very strongly support the conclusions that

- St John's is an important regional landmark in the picturesque landscape planning used to create the Camden Park Estate, the seat of the Macarthur family and that it is very significant in the triumvirate of significant points in the landscape, along with Camden Park House and the township of Camden;
- its setting is a beautiful landscape comprised of mature and exotic tree plantings and open grassed slopes;
- its centre and focal point of St John's Anglican Church is the first Gothic Revival church constructed in NSW that was archaeologically correct in its medieval detail;
- the church, and especially its tower and spire, is aesthetically significant to NSW as part of the regional landscape created by the Macarthur family;
- the regional landscape design is of state heritage significance as an important example of early-mid nineteenth century landscape planning;
- each of the precinct allotments was donated to the Anglican Church by the Macarthur's and the family funded the construction of most of the buildings and patronised the operation of the church throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;
- it is a memorial to the achievements of the Macarthur family in the development of Camden and the Colony of NSW.

We believe St John's Anglican Church Precinct is truly worthy of protection and are very happy to support the Precinct's listing in its entirety on the State heritage register.

Yours sincerely,



Glenda Davis  
President