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Camden modernism

Ian C. Willis
University of Wollongong, iwillis@uow.edu.au

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Abstract
One of the hidden parts of the history of Camden is the influence of modernism. Few in the community know much about it at all. Yet it has an important influence on the town in a variety of ways from domestic and commercial architecture to host of other areas. Modernism is a vague term that describes a philosophical period from the mid-1800s to the mid-20th century. Many supporters of modernism in Camden and across the world rejected the certainties of the Enlightenment and the dogmas of religious belief. Modernism influenced art, music, architecture, social organisation, daily life and the sciences. The period of modernism includes the Victorian period, the Edwardian period and extends to include the interwar period of the 20th century. During the Edwardian period Camden was influenced by the dairy revolution, which saw innovations in the dairy industry. While the economic development and material prosperity of the interwar period was driven by the emerging Burragorang Valley coal industry.

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Camden Modernism

One of the hidden parts of the history of Camden is the influence of modernism. Few in the community know much about it at all. Yet it has an important influence on the town in a variety of ways from domestic and commercial architecture to host of other areas. Modernism is a vague term that describes a philosophical period from the mid-1800s to the mid-20th century

Camden was not isolated from global trends and cultural forces and the trends around modernism are part of this story. The forces of modernism shaped the world were influenced by industrial growth, the growth of cities and the First World War. The Great War and the Russian Revolution challenged ideas from the past and the failure of the status quo. The senseless slaughter of the First World War challenged the moral authority of progress from the Enlightenment.

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Major events during this period included the development of the railway, the The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, the building of engineering structures like the Brooklyn Bridge (1883) and the Eiffel Tower (1889), the innovation of the electric telegraph from 1837, the adoption of standard time by British railway companies from 1845 and the invention of photography.

Modern ideas in art also began to appear more frequently in commercials and logos, an early example of which, from 1919, is the famous London Underground logo designed by Edward Johnston. The skyscraper is the archetypal modernist building. There was the emergence of the Bauhaus School and Art Nouveau. A more sinister reality was emerging on the Continent, in the form of Nazi art and Soviet agit-prop. Only Art Deco, a rather sleek design style aimed at architecture and applied art, expressed any confidence in the future. There was the rise of fascism, the Great Depression and the march towards the Second World War.

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Modernism and changes in fashion

**Shock horror – women show their legs and wear pants**

Changes in fashion through modernity, including in Camden, were representative of changes and continuities in society. The changes were brought by the Industrial Revolution and the technology that it spawned and probably the greatest of these was the railway and in the 20th century, the motor car.

The railways were the greatest revolution of the early modern period and created mass movement of people, regular timetables and triggered the appearance of mass tourism. Steam ships hastened this and Camden folk regularly travelled to the metropolitan centre of the Empire in London.

The growth of industrial society and capitalism brought increased wealth and increased leisure time, entertainment and personal freedom. Mass culture clashed with high culture and the First World War brought the horrors of mechanised warfare.

Many new pastimes were brought by new inventions that included the bicycle, the movies, the motor car, the wireless, the telegraph, the aeroplane and the milk bar. The popularity of the bicycle gave women increased freedom of movement which was represented by the fashions they wore while cycling. There was the need for increased freedom of movement, a new social force had arrived.

Young folk in Camden went to the movies at the Star Empire Theatre and later the Paramount Cinema. They were exposed to the latest fashions in clothing, motor cars and all things American. Icons of early 20th century American culture including the movie stars like Charlie Chaplin and Shirley Temple.

The inter-war period fashions saw women freed from the corset and there was the appearance of cosmetics and rayon, which replaced expensive silk. New industrial processes produced ready-to-wear. There were shorter hemlines and shock horror – women showed their legs and wore pants.

Consumerism was hastened by the Victorians and really gained momentum during the inter-war period. Social norms were challenged and new ideas created by new technologies drove many changes in the daily life of those living in the Camden district.

Camden general stores, like Whitemans and Cliftons, carried goods from all parts of the British Empire for the consumption of the local community. Modernism was a transnational force that embraced the Camden community.

**Interwar Modernism in Camden**

The interwar years were a period of transition and increasingly the motor car replaced the horse in town, and on the farm the horse was replaced by the tractor, all of which supported the growing number of garages in the town. The interwar landscape was characterised by
personalised service, along with home and farm deliveries by both horse and cart and motor cars.

Despite the prosperity of the interwar period the town was still dominated by the colonial gentry and their estates. Apart from their convict labour in the early years, they established a system of class and social relations that ordered daily life in the town from its foundation until after the Second World War. While the townsmen dominated the early period of local government, by Federation the landed gentry had usurped their power and had imposed their political mantra of conservatism on the area. The dominance of the Macarthur’s Camden Park over the local economy during the interwar period was characterised by the construction of the Camden Vale milk processing factory (1926) adjacent to the railway. It was an example of Camden’s industrial modernism. The company developed TB free milk and marketed it through the Camden Vale Milk Bar, a retail outlet on the Hume Highway (1939); complete with a drive-through.

For a country town of its size the town had modern facilities and was up-to-date with the latest technology. The town had two weekly newspapers, Camden News and the Camden Advertiser, there was opening of the telephone exchange (1910), the installation of reticulated gas (1912), electricity (1929), replacement of gas street lighting with electric lights (1932) and a sewerage system (1939), and by 1939 the population has increased to 2394. The town’s prosperity allowed the Presbyterians built a new church (1938), while a number of ‘locals’ built solid brick cottages that reflected their confidence in the town’s future.

**Selected examples of interwar architecture**

**Dairy farming**

1. Camden Vale milk processing factory, 11 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in 1926 by the Camden Vale Milk Co, a subsidiary of Camden Park Estate Pty Ltd.

![Camden Vale Milk Depot Argyle Street Camden 1926 Industrial modernism (Camden Images)](https://camdenhistorynotes.wordpress.com/2016/07/24/camden-modernism/)

Motor industry

3. Cooks Garage, 31-33 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in 1935. Owned by WH Cook. It was built in the Spanish Mission style, and was characterised by terracotta roof tiles, a front loggia, rendering of brickwork and shaped parapets. Since demolished.

4. Main Southern Garage, 20-28 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in the mid 1930s.

5. Dunk House, 56-62 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden, in 1937. The building was a car showroom, shop complex and professional suites owned by EC Dunk.

6. Clintons Motor Showroom, 16 Argyle Street, Camden. The car showroom was built in 1947 by Mark Jensen for Clinton Motors, the Holden dealership in Camden. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory it is a rare masonry Art Deco style building with large shopfront windows and wrap around awning.

Retail

7. 102-104 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1939. Stuckey Bros, bakers and pastry cooks, occupied premises and fitted it out in 1940. According to the Camden News it was ‘fitted with every modern device’.
8. Bank of New South Wales (Westpac), 121-123 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1936. The two storey building had a residence upstairs and a banking chamber downstairs. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory the building is Georgian Revival style.

9. Rural Bank, 115-119 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1937. The two storey building had a residence upstairs with banking chamber downstairs. Art deco style. There is trachyte stonework on the facing of building.

Churches

10. Presbyterian Church, 42 John Street, Camden. Built in 1938. Architect: George Gray, R.Vale. A brick church, which according to the Camden Heritage Inventory the buildings is Gothic Revival (Gothic Interwar) style.

Hotels

11. Camden Inn (Hotel), 105-107 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1933. Tudor style.

Agriculture

12. Front, AH&I Hall, 191-195 Argyle Street, Camden. The brick front of the building was added to the weatherboard hall in 1936. The original hall was constructed in 1899 by George Furner for JW Macarthur Onslow as a drill hall for the Camden Mounted Rifles.

Cinema

13. Paramount Theatre, 39 Elizabeth Street, Camden. Built in 1933. It was owned by DJ Kennedy who had interests in other suburban movie cinemas in the Sydney area. It was designed in the Spanish Mission style.

Residential

Elizabeth Street, Camden

15. Flats, 33 Elizabeth Street, Camden. Built in 1930.

Menangle Road, Camden

16. Cottages, 1-3 Menangle Road, Camden. Built between 1924-1925 by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory a group of Californian Bungalows.

Murray Street, Camden.


Hospital

20. Extension, Camden Hospital, Menangle Road, Camden. Built by Mel Peat in 1939.

Aviation

21. Bellman Hangers, Camden Airfield, Macquarie Grove Road, Camden. Built in 1941. The Federal Government acquired the airfield from Edward Macarthur Onslow in 1940 for a central flying school under the Empire Air Training Scheme. The hangers were erected by RAAF as temporary accommodation for aircraft. They were designed by NS Bellman in 1936 (UK) as temporary buildings.
Camden Cafes and Milk Bars

The local milk bar is a largely unrecognized part of Camden modernism where the latest trends in American food culture made their way into the small country town by Australian-Greek immigrants. The design, equipment and fit-out of local cafes and milk bars was at the cutting edge of Interwar fashion. The cafes were a touch of the exotic with their Art Deco style interiors, where fantasy met food without the social barriers of daily life of the Interwar period. Camden milk bars rarely just sold milk shakes unlike their counterparts in the city. To make a living and ensure that their businesses paid their way the cafes and milk bars also sold fruit and vegetables, meals, sandwiches, lollies, sweets and chocolates.

These include Camden Cafe owned by the Sophios Bros, then the Cassimatis Bros in the 1930s. It became the Capital Cafe in 1935. There was the iconic Camden Valley Inn Milk Bar opened with a great fuss in 1939 on Camden Park estate by the Macarthur Onslow family.
Stuckey Bros Building Camden, Bakers

Camden has an art-deco style inspired building at 102-104 Argyle Street. It is the 1940 Stuckey Bros Pastrycooks and Bakers building, built by Harry Willis and Sons. The bakery was operated by HH & LC Stuckey and a bakery had been on the site from before 1912, when the Stuckeys purchased the business from J Fleming.

The building front is yellow-cream brick called polychrome, meaning a brick with more than one colour. The shop front above street level is finely detailed with curved bricks and bay-style window in the centre of the building. The roof is green tiles.

The building is an interesting and unusual example of a two-storey Interwar retail building. The use of decorative polychrome brickwork is unusual for Camden township. It is an attractive example of a commercial building, and while the street level shopfronts have been altered it has not compromised the integrity of the remainder of the building.

Originally the shopfront was tiled with curved glass (bow windows) defining the shop entrance. There was a laneway on the western side (facing the shopfront the right-hand side) with access to the rear of the premises, which now has a retail business located on it. Many Camden Argyle Street laneways have been filled in and are now occupied by retail premises. How many can you pick?

The shopfront is the public interface for retail premises and streetscapes. Stuckey Bros original shopfront window glass had metal surrounds and a tiled entry (ings/outgo or setback) that made it three-dimensional and interesting. A style of shopfront that was common from the Edwardian period. The shopfront awning is still largely as it was in 1940.

According to the Camden News Stuckey Bros was fitted out with every 'modern device'. The shop opened at 6.30am, and the first shop assistant arrived at 8.00am. The shop closed at 7.00pm and operated 6 days a week. The doughmakers came in at 11.00pm and the bakers used wood-fired ovens, which were fired up over the weekends as it took too long to heat them up when cold.

Stuckey Bros did home deliveries with a horse and cart to Camden, Elderslie, Cobbitty and Brownlow Hill. The mailmen would take bread to The Oaks, Burrarorang Valley, Yerranderie, Werombi, and Orangeville. The Stuckeys kept their horses in the Rectory paddock next to St John's Church.

The Stuckeys were a staunch Methodist family and Beryl Stuckey played the organ at the Methodist Church, while Frank Stuckey was the superintendent of the Sunday School for over 20 years from the 1940s.

The site of the Stuckey Bros shop and bakery had been used as a bakery from 1852 when William McEwan built a premises and in the 1890s Mrs McEwan helped her sons Geordy and Alf run the business.

Dunk House, A Modern Car Showroom in Camden.

There is a building at 56-62 Argyle Street, Camden, which is an understated Art Deco style example of the Interwar period. It is Dunk House. Its integrity is still largely intact and it clearly shows the impact of the new found wealth in the town from the Burragorang coalfields.

Dunk House has intact art deco style motifs adjacent to the entry above the display window front. There is black tiling on the shopfront, and a brass surround of the large display window on the former car showroom. The showroom has intact timber flooring and the interior and shopfronts have little changed from the 1930s when the building was erected by its owners. The brass names plates are still attached to the shopfront where the tenant business would put their name plate.

The Dunk House was built by renowned Camden builder Harry Willis & Sons in 1937. The premises was a car showroom, shopping complex and professional suites owned by EC Dunk. Downstairs there were 3 shops, the largest being a car showroom for General Motors cars. Upstairs there were 8 ‘compartments’ or rooms or what we would not call professional suites, each fitted out with modern amenities which included water, wash basin and electric light.

The tenants in 1937 included the downstairs shopfront leased by L Lakin, grocer and Mr Boulous, mercer. Later they included JL Hogg, dentist and in the 1950s dentist Newton Tobrett. At the rear of the property there a series of sheds which operated at auction rooms run by the Dunks.

In 1938 EC Dunk was the Camden agent for General Motors Chevrolet cars.
Gayline Drive-In Movie Theatre at Narellan

One of the notable attractions in the local area in the 1950s-1990s was the drive in movie theatre, which was located on Morshead Road, Narellan (now Narellan Vale). Along with rock 'n roll, transistor radios, the bikini, the mini-skirt, it defined the lifestyle of the baby boomers. It was as popular with teenagers as it was with young families. It was a defining moment for a 20th century culture that was based around the icons of the period: cars and movies.

The drive in at Narellan was owned and operated from 1967-1992 by EJ Frazer and operated as the Gayline Drive in Movie Theatre.

Modernism in 1960s Elderslie NSW
The lands releases in the Camden suburb of Elderslie in 1960s have produced a number of houses that have expressed mid-20th century modernism. The house designs were taken from the book of project homes of the day and were quite progressive.

Australian architects including Robin Boyd were expressing Australian modernism. These architects were commissioned by housing developers like Lend Lease to design their housing estates. One such development was the Lend Lease Apple Tree Estate at Glen Waverley in Melbourne. Another Lend Lease land release and group of show homes were at their 1962 Kingsdene Estate in Carlingford.

The Elderslie homes were built by the miners who worked in the Burrarorang Valley and they wanted new modern houses. They generated the wealth that funded the urban growth of the Camden suburbs of Elderslie and South Camden.

Elderslie was one of the original land grants to John Oxley in 1816. The area has been dominated by farming, particularly orchards and vineyards.

Elderslie examples of 1960s modernism include houses in Luker Street characterised by low-pitched roofs, open planned but restrained design, with lots of natural light streaming in full length glass panels adjacent to natural timbers and stone. There are also ranch style houses in River Road with open planning and wide frontages to the street, some architect designed.

These houses are all located in and amongst Federation style farming houses of the Edwardian period. The Federation style houses were on large blocks of land that were sub-divided during the 1960s.

The now demolished Henning's house in Macarthur Road (image) is an example of open planned ranch style. Other modernist designs are the blocks of flats in Purcell Street, with use of decorative wrought iron railings.

Sunset Avenue in Elderslie was a new land release with a mix of 1960s modern low-pitched roof open planned houses interspersed with New South Wales Housing Commission fibro construction homes.

Other land releases of the 1960s were the New South Wales Housing Commission 1960s fibro houses some of which are located in Burrarong Road and Somerset Street.

Ranch-style housing in Elderslie

There are a number of ranch style houses in the Elderslie area along Macarthur Road and River Road in particular. Some are brick, while others are timber construction.

Ranch-style housing is a significant post-Second World War housing style. The housing style has been noted by architect Robert Irving as an Australian domestic architecture style. Parramatta City Council has recognised the housing style of heritage significance.

American History of Ranch-Style Homes

The original house style came from California and the South-west of the USA, where architects in these areas designed the first suburban ranch-style houses in the 1920s and 1930s. They were simple one-storey houses built by ranchers who lived on the prairies...
Sunset Avenue in Elderslie was a new land release with a mix of 1960s modern low-pitched roof open planned houses interspersed with New South Wales Housing Commission fibro construction homes.

Other land releases of the 1960s were the New South Wales Housing Commission 1960s fibro houses some of which are located in Burrawong Road and Somerset Street.

The integrity of the residence was intact until it was demolished in 2011, including the front fence that was built in 1960 by the Hennings of ‘Chromatex’ bricks. There were a number of mature trees on the site that added to the aesthetic quality of the site.

In 2011 a ranch-style house in Macarthur Road Elderslie was unfortunately demolished to make way for a pre-school. Camden’s ranch-style houses are part of the town’s post-Second World War development and growth.

The Macarthur Road house was one of a number in the Elderslie area and two of these have been demolished. One of the demolished ranch-style houses, Kalinda, was located off Lodges Road Elderslie and owned by the Whiteman family. The Whitemans owned a general store in Camden that operated for nearly a century. The house was a weatherboard cottage and demolished in late 1990s to make way for Sydney’s urban development in the Elderslie area. The house was located high on the ridge with a pleasant outlook facing west over the Narellan Creek floodplain. Visitors approached the house from Lodges Road by driving up to the top of the ridge along a narrow driveway.