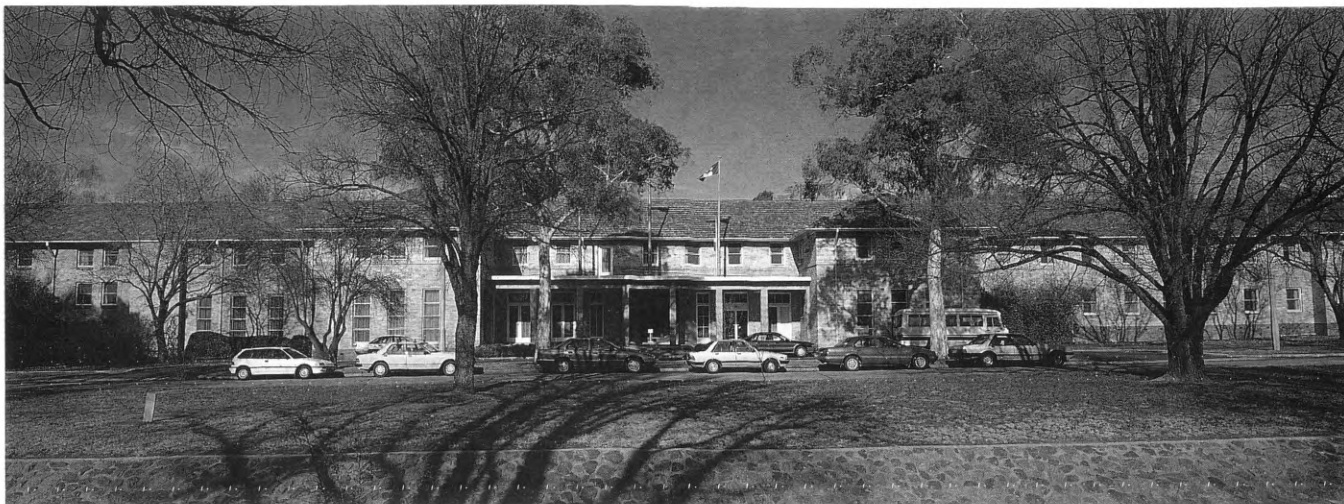


Plans for refurbishment retain an air of the past

By Maurice Austin



The Australian Federal Police College is soon to undergo major refurbishment.

Some members and staff members of the AFP will remember staying in a government hostel called Lawley House in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time it was a fairly comfortable home away from home for interstate public servants – not quite as posh or sought after as Brassey House, but still one of the better Canberra hostels.

Lawley House is no longer a government hostel. Just before the birth of the AFP, the building was taken over by the Commonwealth Police as a Training College, and it was acquired by the AFP on amalgamation in 1979.

What did it take to turn a hostel into a training college? Simple – knock out some of the walls in one wing and turn them into training rooms and a library, and take the beds out of some of the bedrooms and turn them into offices. AFP personnel all over Australia will recognise in these few simple changes the layout of Barton College to this day. The alterations were carried out on a shoestring budget, and since then the building has deteriorated, while the training and accommodation needs of the AFP have risen.

In 1994, not all that much has changed. In some ways Barton College is still Lawley House with blackboards and desks.

In 1990 a proposal was put forward to build a new headquarters building and a new training college on AFP land at Majura in the ACT. However, the college component

alone was expected to cost \$50 million, which was considered excessive expenditure and for this and other reasons – including isolation from the rest of Canberra – the proposal was abandoned.

Other possibilities included the acquisition of a surplus ACT school and the demolition and rebuilding



The remodelled entrance to the college will allow vehicles to pick up and drop off passengers under cover.

of the current Barton College, but all were shelved for reasons of unavailability or excessive cost.

Australian Construction Services (ACS) were commissioned to undertake a thorough investigation into the deficiencies of the building.

The 1992 ACS Report identified a number of occupational health and safety, electrical, mechanical and other deficiencies, and recommended a complete overhaul, estimated to cost \$20 million. The AFP put the proposal to Cabinet but only \$4 million was approved.

This meant that the college would have all of the layout, contortion and circulation problems it had before. However, the upgrading approved by Cabinet could be considered a perfect opportunity to make some of the major changes which were certainly necessary, but which would cost more than the \$4 million already approved.

Expressions of interest were called from various firms to determine which could provide the best value for money, both within the \$4 million, and for a complete overhaul of the college. The most suitable submission for a complete overhaul was found to be a proposal for \$10.5 million from Manteena Pty Ltd.

The answer to extra funding was to come from Training Division itself. Training Division generates income for the AFP because it charges other agencies for the training it provides, and this is where Resources and Services Division and the Department of Finance come into the story.

The AFP decided to pay for a \$10.5 million refurbishment of Barton College by using the \$4 million allocated by Cabinet and taking out a loan (called a "Resources Agreement") from the Department of Finance for the rest of the cost of the refurbishment. The loan would be repaid over ten years using the money earned from training other agencies and from hiring out some of the facilities of the refurbished college.

Currently, the refurbishment plan is progressing well through the various approval processes, but it



This view shows the central quadrangle remodelled as a formal courtyard. The curved wall enclosing the spiral staircase is at the extreme right.

is by no means totally assured. Although Cabinet has already approved the Resources Agreement, the proposal still needs to be approved by the Standing Parliamentary Committee on Public Works (PWC). Given a favourable recommendation by the PWC and formal ratification by Parliament, the work should commence in the first week in May.

Imagine you are entering the College sometime toward the end of 1995. What will you find? For a start, the best features of the College will still be there. The lounge, the pool tables, the old-fashioned club-like atmosphere, the polished panelling, the barbecue in the courtyard, yes, even the spiral staircase in the entrance formerly forbidden to students – all these familiar things will remain.

A great deal, however, will have changed beyond recognition, and many features that made the college a pain in the neck to study and work in will be gone. As well as the many invisible improvements like better air-conditioning, electrical services, plumbing and fire safety, some of the delights that await the students and staff of the new Barton College are:

- a new circulation corridor is to be built around the inside of the courtyard in the Training-Library wing to allow people to move around the wing without

being blocked by the training rooms or the library;

- the Library will be upgraded and moved to the central core of the building;
- a lift will be installed and wheelchair access provided to the front entrance;
- ensuite facilities will be included in all accommodation;
- the gymnasium will be moved to the accommodation wing, near the current sauna;
- an auditorium and conference facilities will be built;
- office areas will be opened up;
- the central service area and carpark will be remodelled as a formal courtyard with an ornamental pool;
- the front of the building will be remodelled to include a *portecochere*, extending from the entrance over the driveway, so that vehicles can discharge passengers in all weather;
- more light, more space, new paint, new carpet – and people will be able to use the front door.

Within two years the AFP will have an efficient, pleasant and safe college that retains all the best features of Lawley House – and by 2005, it will even be paid for. Book early to avoid the rush.