

A BRIEF HISTORY

The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) building is one of Canberra's most beautiful Art Deco buildings with a colourful history.

In 1924 the Acton Peninsula, which traditionally belonged to the Ngunnawal people, was selected as the site for the National Museum of Australian Zoology following a visit to Canberra by distinguished medical scientist Dr (later Sir) Colin MacKenzie. However, in August 1928 the facility was established as the Australian Institute of Anatomy in an agreement between the Australian Federal Government and MacKenzie, who became its first Director and Professor of Comparative Anatomy. MacKenzie also donated a substantial part of his collection to the Institute.

The main building was completed in 1930. It exemplifies both 1920s Art Deco and late 20th Century Stripped Classical architecture, as well as a simplified and modern version of ancient Greek and Roman architecture. Buildings in this style often feature a symmetrical façade, a horizontal skyline, classical columns and a central entrance. A residence for the Director was also built on the site.

The platypus features symbolically throughout the building as Sir Colin MacKenzie believed the ancient monotreme was the link between mammal, bird and reptile.

The Australian Institute of Anatomy proved a popular visitor attraction with its standing collection of anatomical and Indigenous exhibitions. The Institute's research role evolved over the decades, with the focus remaining on medical studies.



The construction of the Australian Institute of Anatomy. Courtesy of National Archives of Australia

In April 1984 the Australian Government announced the establishment of the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) which would acquire, preserve and make accessible a national collection of Australia's audiovisual cultural heritage. This was based, in large part, on functions previously undertaken by the National Library of Australia.

The then vacant Institute of Anatomy building became the NFSA's national headquarters. The NFSA was formally opened by the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke AC, GCL on 3 October 1984.



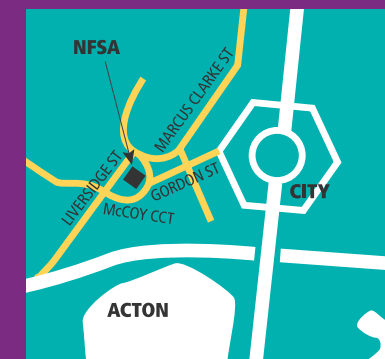
NFSA annex, Liversidge St

The large annex was added in 1999 to support the NFSA's growth and houses specialist film, video and audio technical laboratories, and curatorial and administrative staff.

The buildings, although modified slightly, still retain the substantially intact original fabric and architectural detail.

The NFSA buildings and entire site are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) 1999*. The Commonwealth Heritage List is a list of natural and cultural heritage places owned or controlled by the Australian Government, established under the EPBC Act. In June 2004 the NFSA Acton site was added to this list.

The original landscape of the site was designed and implemented by Alexander E Bruce, Director of Parks and Gardens from 1926 to 1936. It included avenues of trees along boundary roads with a scatter of trees throughout the site. The front of the building had a hedge around the drive and a rose garden and trees in the centre. The courtyard had a gravel path across the lawns.



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The NFSA also has offices in Sydney and Melbourne and Access Centres available at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Melbourne and at State Libraries in Hobart, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Darwin.

AUSTRALIA'S LIVING ARCHIVE
www.nfsa.gov.au

**IF THESE WALLS
 COULD TALK**

A GUIDE TO ONE OF
 CANBERRA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL
 ART DECO BUILDINGS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FORMER AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ANATOMY AND THE HOME OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE

EXTERIOR

The building is faced in Hawkesbury sandstone quarried near Gosford, NSW. Providing a warm contrast is the red granite from Tarana (near Bathurst), NSW at the base of the exterior and front steps.

ART DECO FEATURES

Blue, yellow and green stylised designs inspired by Indigenous Australian bark paintings are displayed on tiled panels between the windows.

Goannas, ferns and waratahs have been carved into the capitals of the columns of the curved portico at the building's entrance.



Carved stone open-mouthed frilled neck lizards framed in stylised boomerangs (1) surround the geometrical patterned front door.



Geometric Art Deco patterns are featured throughout the building, in suspended light fittings (2) in the gallery and in the heating and air vents.

The creation of the Institute of Anatomy also involved the establishment of its own unique typeface. Examples can be seen in the front building signage and on the exit signs throughout the building.

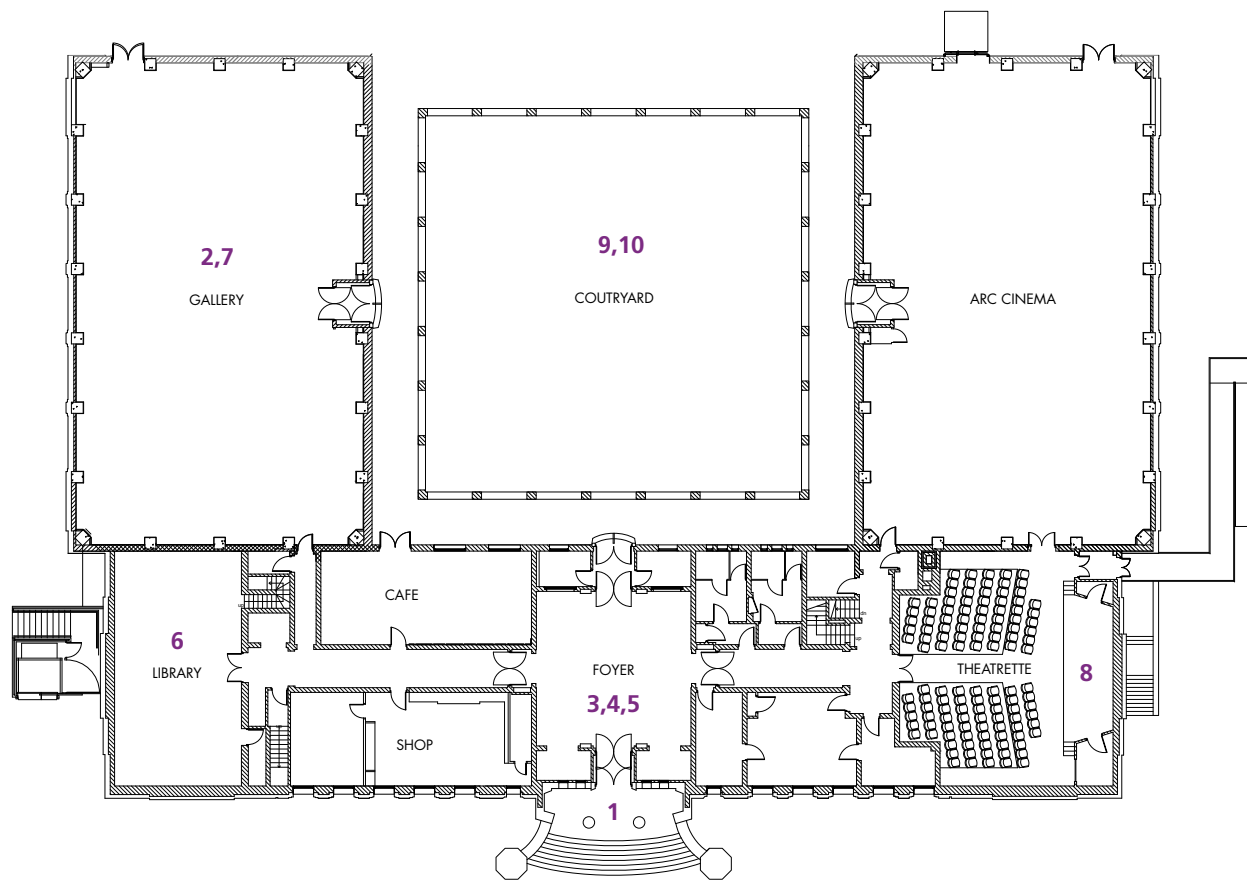
FOYER



The geometrically patterned marble floor (3) is inspired by Indigenous Australian art. Black marble in the floor and half-columns was quarried from approximately 300 metres away at Acton Flats, now beneath Lake Burley Griffin. This is the only building in Canberra to have this type of marble as the quarry was virtually exhausted by the end of the project.

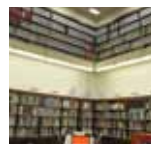


The large stained-glass skylight featuring a stylised platypus (4) is a rare example of glazing from the British company Luxfer.



Along the walls are face masks of famous scientists (5), including two made from death masks (for further information, please ask Reception). The Sir Colin MacKenzie commemorative plaque has his ashes interred behind it.

LIBRARY



The original library features striking geometric Art Deco patterns in the skylight (6) and wood panelling.

EXHIBITION GALLERIES



The walls feature decorative capitals on pilasters with plaster castings of the platypus, kookaburra (7), tree kangaroo, koala and wombat, painted in bronze to resemble bronze cast sculptures.

The Southern Gallery, now housing exhibition material from the NFSA's national audiovisual collection, was originally used to display skeletons, casts of prehistoric skulls, anatomical specimens and models.

The Northern Gallery is now home to Arc cinema, which was developed with full sympathy for the building's unique design and historical significance. Originally it was devoted to displays of applied anatomy, mainly of Australian fauna specimens.

THEATRETTE



The former lecture theatre is now a typical example of an early twentieth century theatre hall (8), with characteristic colour scheme and rich jarrah hardwood floors. The wooden stage includes the original blackboard, located behind the screen.

COURTYARD

In 1988, noted Canberra garden designer Cedric Bryant re-landscaped the courtyard, in keeping with 1920s Art Deco garden traditions. This garden was opened by Mrs Hazel Hawke, the then wife of former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke in September 1991.

The fragrant garden, near the café, includes daphne and various coloured lavenders planted under a spreading loquat tree, a species originating from China and Japan which bears abundant fruit each season.



The corner diagonally opposite is predominantly shaded and features winter/spring flowers including camellias, azaleas and pieris.

The memorial fishpond (9) was dedicated to Sir Colin MacKenzie and was a gift from Lady MacKenzie. It features an ornamental pool with a bronze platypus sculpture and plaque.



Wombat heads within plaques (10) are located by the arches that surround the courtyard and continue the symmetry of the building.