



News Update 38

April 2004

ABC TV DOCUMENTARY ON THE GRIFFINS' IDEALS

Compass. Sunday 18 April 9.45 - 10.15pm

A new documentary *Beyond Architecture*, produced by Roger Bailey, will premiere on the ABC's *Compass* program, hosted by Geraldine Doogue. The program explores the Griffins' philosophical beliefs and the way these influenced their architecture. The film crew visited Griffin buildings and interviewed Professor James Weirick a world authority on WB Griffin; Professor Jill Roe from the History Faculty at Macquarie University; internationally acclaimed architect Greg Burgess who is recipient of the 2004 RAI A Gold Medal, and is restoring Essendon Incinerator in Melbourne, Marie Nicholls and Graham Pont retired senior academic of the University of NSW. Please consult your local guides to confirm the broadcast date and time.

THE GRIFFINS AND MILES FRANKLIN

The exhibition *Miles Franklin: A brilliant career?* is on at the State Library of New South Wales (1 March – 20 June 2004) to mark the 50th anniversary of Miles Franklin's death. The exhibition includes a letter to her aunt Annie Franklin dated 21 November 1913 in which Miles Franklin describes going to Griffin's office in Chicago 'to see the mold of land on which he was to lay out the Federal Capital'.

Of further interest is an article by Miles Franklin from 'The Bulletin' vol.58 no.2977 (5 March 1937, page 2) published shortly after Walter Burley Griffin's death. This article was recently discovered by Professor Jill Roe in the course of research for her forthcoming biography of Miles Franklin. It is reproduced on page 2.

HERITAGE FESTIVAL EVENT

Sunday 2 May. 10.30 am to 3.00 pm. Corner of Edinburgh Rd and The Postern, Castlecrag.

In a further development of the very successful pattern established in last year's National Trust Heritage Week, this year the Society will host a major event celebrating the Festival's theme: "Foundations of Tomorrow in the Year of the Built Environment".

We have invited ten heritage and community bodies and Willoughby City Council to join us setting up stalls to provide information and sell a variety of heritage-related items.

We plan four types of guided walks:

- Introducing the Griffins' Castlecrag. This walk is intended to introduce the Griffin story, Walter's architecture and the planning, walkways and reserves of the Griffin Conservation Area. Walks will depart at frequent intervals on demand and will last about an hour.
- Griffin for the enthusiast. A much more detailed walk led by Professor James Weirick intended for more specialised people. The walk departs at 10.30 am and lasts about two and a half hours.
- Hidden Castlecrag. A walk exploring Griffin's lesser-known reserves and pathways. This walk will also rendezvous with some bush regeneration groups in the reserves in which they are working and will have access to the gardens of some Griffin houses. The walk departs at 11.00 am and lasts about two hours. It covers some rough terrain.

- Castlecrag – inspiration for the modern architect. Led by Castlecrag-resident architects, these walks will look at the work of well-known and emerging post-war architects such as Muller, Seidler, Lucas, Cox and Popov. They will also illustrate the importance to heritage conservation of effective planning. The walks depart 11.30 am and 1.30 pm and last about ninety minutes.

Please note that advance booking is strongly recommended for all but the introductory walks. Call the Secretary (02 9958 4516) for bookings or further information. Members receive discounts on walk tickets and heritage material. There will be no internal house inspections on this occasion.

The walks will proceed if it is raining, but the assembly point and heritage stalls will be moved to the Castlecrag Community Centre at the end of The Postern.

**EXHIBITION: SEEING IS BELIEVING
Mosman Library, 24 April to 2 May 2004**

605 Military Road, Mosman, Sydney
Free admission (closed Mondays)

An exhibition of plans and photographs of significant buildings in Mosman, emphasising an extensive collection of original plans dating from 1935 to 1967 produced by some of Sydney’s talented architects, includes the van der Ley House by WB Griffin. Enquiries 99784090



ABOVE: The van der Ley House, Clifton Gardens late 1920s. Photograph courtesy Deirdre and Ivor Morton

MILES FRANKLIN ON WB GRIFFIN

The article below was recently unearthed in a 1937 *Bulletin* (see page 1)

Walter Burley Griffin

‘From the beginning Australia has attracted gifted men and women who have discerned here the scope for achievements in advance of those possible in older countries. Of these none has had the higher progress of Australia more selflessly at heart than Walter Burley Griffin. His passing brings a sense of profound loss to all those interested in the urban development of the Commonwealth.

I first met him in his offices high above Lake Michigan in Chicago, where he and his wife showed Alice Henry and me the plans for the dream city of Canberra. At that date the young architect’s thick crest was of Saxon gold, to match in coloring his eyes of flame blue. His design for the Federal Capital had just won a world-wide competition. He was the partner of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work was of great significance and a subject of controversy in the United States. Despite this spectacular associate, Walter Burley Griffin was already established by the wide range and independence of his own ideas. With powerful initiative he was planning homes, factories and towns, and was highly esteemed personally for his adherence to the right and the beautiful, regardless of expediency or his own personal reward. He and Mrs Griffin were about to move their home and make Australia the centre of their life’s endeavour forthwith. Never, they felt, had there been a better opportunity to create anew, free from the debris of old mistakes and the shackles of dead tradition, than in this wonderland with its forward-looking and independently-minded democracy.

The difficulties in realising the architectural and town-planning conceptions of a genius whose creations were unorthodox were considerable. Some natural alarm and a good deal of bureaucratic obstruction resulted. In the inevitable clashes it is on record that under all provocations and misunderstandings Griffin was courteous and patient. This was in keeping with the natural greatness of the man, and therefore, despite all differences and difficulties, Canberra, today so beautiful in its magnificent planning, remains an expression of Griffin’s original ideas, and is his Federal monument. Also outstanding among his Australian work is Newman College of the Melbourne University, a noble building “not imitative but innovating” to quote Professor Ernest Scott.

Griffin’s idea was that our architecture should be suited to conditions, and designed to preserve and develop the peculiarly Australian beauty of landscape. To this end he protected the native shrubberies of Castlecrag at Middle Harbor, and otherwise saved the estate from vandalism and commercial exploitation. Here each cottage is unique, built to harmonise with its surroundings in the completed scheme, and always with practical understanding of the housewife’s needs and comfort. The open-air theatre on the estate is a characteristic expression of the Griffin service to the arts and community life. At definite seasons during the last two years Greek and morality or folk dramas have been presented by Griffin and Mrs Griffin and their associates. This gully theatre is phenomenally suited to its purpose, and much of the labour was done by Griffin’s own hands. He delighted in odd chores, and would say: “A certain amount of scullion labor is good for one.”

Though none worked harder, he always made time to help others in their problems. He had a merry sense of humour, even against himself, which twinkled in his eyes and came to his tongue in wit that was never biting. Once when an imperceptive broadcasting official at first asked him to make a discourse of half an hour, and then if he could cut it to 20 or 15 minutes in favor of jazz, Griffin chuckled, “Great men can tell all they know in 20 minutes. Ten minutes ought to be too long for me.”

Referring to the fact that Australian flora sometimes lacks charm to alien eyes, he said that the way to approach it was with the mind

emptied of all preconceptions and comparisons, and then the fairy grace and strangeness of Australian plants took possession of the senses. He would never let the humblest of Australian plants be destroyed unnecessarily. Among his and Mrs Griffin's first studies on arrival was indigenous botany, and their academic knowledge was ever at the disposal of Australians who knew their plants only by the colloquial names. One of the last lectures Griffin gave at Castlecrag was on land planning. Here, in advance of accepted thought, he emphasised the importance of the land itself as a living continuous entity calling for preservation and understanding, and made special reference to the soil about him, which could so rapidly spill into the harbor under wrong treatment.

At the time of his death he was in Lucknow, where he had gone about 18 months ago to superintend the erection of the library, plans for which had been obtained from his Sydney office, where his partner was E.M. Nicholls. Once in India he became involved in such extensive operations that Mrs Griffin joined him last year. They were of those fortunate pairs whose personal and public interests are one; further, they were partners in their profession. Their like is rare.

Those qualified to do so will put on record the professional achievements of Walter Burley Griffin. Mine is the privilege to pay a small tribute to the personality of this distinguished American, whose quarter of a century of high endeavour here makes him forever a great Australian. He loved this country with artistic insight and independence, and for it refused undertakings elsewhere that carried the certainty of wealth and fame. Time will set his life here in true perspective and crystallise the influence of his spiritual and artistic integrity. A man in a generation, Australia would be honoured if his ashes could rest at Canberra.'

Editor's note: The Griffins' friendship with Miles Franklin started in Chicago but the date of their first meeting remains an intriguing question. The first record in Miles Franklin's diaries is a visit to the Griffin office on 4 June 1912, followed by further meetings that week, which lead to an article on Griffin and the Canberra plan, co-authored with fellow Australian Alice Henry, which was published in the *Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1912. However as James Weirick discussed in *Transition* nos.27/28, 1989, the Griffins are listed as delegates to a Single Tax Conference in

Chicago, 24-26 November 1911 and Miles Franklin attended the conference banquet on 25 November, i.e. at the time the Griffins were working on their entry in the Australian Federal Capital Competition. If, indeed, they met Miles Franklin on that occasion, Walter and Marion would have had the opportunity to discuss Australia and the Federal Capital with possibly the only person in North America who had a personal knowledge of the Canberra site.

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

In late October last year the Society held its fifteenth AGM. I was pleased to report that it remains solid financially and your committee continues to work very hard furthering the Society's interests across a wide variety of programmes. Members who would like a copy of the Management Committee or Financial Reports should contact the Secretary.

The guest speaker at the AGM was Stuart Mackenzie, the National Capital Authority's Principal Urban Designer. Stuart is the director of the NCA's project called "The Griffin Legacy" which we described in the April 2003 Newsletter. In his presentation, Stuart described a number of possible projects in Canberra which would reinstate important elements of the Griffins' plan. The Society continues to be consulted on this work. The NCA's proposals will be unveiled for public discussion during April.

Last year at this time, following our Members' Survey, I reported that the Committee was endeavouring to find ways to increase membership numbers, especially outside Sydney. We are now delighted to announce that the inaugural meeting of the Canberra Chapter of the Society will be held at the National Archives building in Canberra at 5.30 pm on May 10, 2004. While the overall goals of the Canberra Chapter will be the same as those of the Society, no doubt its plans and day-to-day activities will differ, reflecting local opportunities and members' interests. This event will be widely publicised and all are welcome. The Canberra Chapter's aims, activities and operating guidelines will be discussed at the meeting. From initial feedback, we are confident of soon having a large, community-based chapter of Griffin enthusiasts operating in our capital city.

Work continues on the Society's website. Its basic framework is established and we are very grateful that member Bryan Richards is doing an excellent job guiding its development towards a launch later this year. There being so many elements to the Griffins' story and such a variety of audiences to address, the development of a high-quality website is proving to take longer than expected.

Andrew Kirk



ABOVE: Women delegates to the 1912 Chicago convention of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party. Miles Franklin is in the front row second from left. Roosevelt's platform included woman suffrage. Photo reproduced from the catalogue published by the State Library of New South Wales to accompany the exhibition *Miles Franklin: A Brilliant Career?*

**EXHIBITION:
THE ARCHITECT OF THE TOWER: THE ICONIC
ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN OF
ROY ALSTAN LIPPINCOTT
Auckland War Memorial Museum,
5 February – 9 May 2004**

Roy Lippincott is perhaps better known in Australia as the architect who set up office with the Griffins when they moved here from Chicago after winning the Canberra competition in 1912. Lippincott, married to Walter's sister Genevieve, had worked with the Griffins in Chicago and was closely associated with their practice in Australia until he, with another Griffin office architect Edward Billson, won the competition to design the University of Auckland's Arts Building, now affectionately known as the Clock Tower, in 1921. The Auckland Arts Building continues the creative reinterpretation of 'collegiate Gothic' architecture of the Griffins' Newman College with which Lippincott and Billson were closely involved from design documentation to completion.

This exhibition on Lippincott's architecture and interior design in New Zealand from 1921-1939 traces the origins for the design of the Arts Building as well as a number of the University's other significant Lippincott designs including the Custodian's Cottage (now known as Lippincott Cottage) and the (Old) Biology Building.

Inspired by Lippincott's association with the Griffins, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School in Chicago, the Clock Tower helped define the University's architectural spirit, combining traditional architectural elements with local decorative motifs; flax flowers, ponga fronds and kaka can be found in the stone detailing.

The exhibition includes furniture and light fittings designed by Lippincott as well as a superb rendering of the Arts Building on silk executed by Roy Lippincott in the distinctive style developed by Marion Mahony.

More information: *Architecture in New Zealand*, March – April 2004. www.aucklandmuseum.com

Anne Watson and Professor James Weirick

**AMENDED CONTROLS FOR THE GRIFFIN
CONSERVATION AREA, CASTLECRAG**

Congratulations to Willoughby City Councillors for their recent unanimous decision to adopt the Amended Draft Development Control Plan 19 - Heritage and Conservation (DCP 19).

The Society applauds Council for preparing the amendments to DCP 19 to improve the protection of the amenity and heritage of the Conservation Areas

of Willoughby City. The process has involved four years of consultation with the community. In February a workshop on DCP 19 was attended by over 50 people, an indication of the importance of this issue to the residents of Willoughby.

The amended DCP retains specific sections on each of Willoughby City's twelve conservation areas including the Griffin Conservation Area. It sets out the character that the Plan seeks to retain and the management policies to achieve this. These policies have been strengthened, more clearly defining the controls to be followed but with several concessions to contemporary living.

The Society is very pleased that a Statement of Intent has been included in the section on the Griffin Conservation Area in Castlecrag, outlining fundamental principles to guide its ongoing protection and management. The document's Statement of Significance for the Griffin Conservation Area has also been elaborated.

**RECENT PUBLISHED INFORMATION ON THE
GRIFFINS**

- An important monograph on twentieth century planning, which includes a comprehensive analysis and critique of Griffin's Canberra Plan, has been written by the Swiss scholar, Dr Wolfgang Sonne: *Representing the State: Capital City Planning in the Early Twentieth Century* Prestel, Munich, 2004. The study places Canberra in comparative perspective with regard to Washington, Berlin, New Delhi and The Hague.
- *American National Biography* published by Oxford University Press under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies in 1999, includes fine profiles of both Walter and Marion, written by Professor Paul Kruty of the University of Illinois. This listing adds to the biographical accounts of the Griffins' lives in key reference works.
- *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century Architecture* Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004, has important contributions by Jeff Turnbull on Walter Burley Griffin, Paul Kruty on the Plan of Canberra, and Paul Sprague who acknowledges Marion's contribution to the completion of Frank Lloyd Wright's renowned Robie House, and her possible authorship of the design of the art glass windows and iron gates of the auto court.

News Update editors: Kerry McKillop (02) 9958 4516
and Adrienne Kabos (02) 9958 2060
Contributions are welcomed.