

News Update

February 1995

Historic Houses Trust auctions GSDA No.1 Dwelling

On the 25th February when GSDA No.1 Dwelling and the neighbouring new development built by Historic Houses Trust (HHT) will be auctioned it will be two years to the day that HHT purchased GSDA No.1 Dwelling also at auction for temporary acquisition for the purpose of conservation.

This was, and is, an important and innovative initiative for HHT and for heritage conservation generally. New South Wales has many significant heritage buildings, far too many to be permanently acquired for preservation. Thus this new approach of temporary acquisition for the purpose of restoration and selling on, back into the market place, is a very important initiative that the Society fully supports and encourages.

GSDA No.1 Dwelling was designed by Griffin in 1921 as the first display house in the Castlecrag Estate and was in near-original condition with very continued on page 2

75th Anniversary of GSDA

It is 75 years ago that Griffin founded the Greater Sydney Development Association to develop Castlecrag, Covecrag (Middlecove) and Castlecove. To celebrate the Society is planning events for Sunday 3rd September including guided walks, some house inspections, an exhibition of Max Dupain's photographs and early Griffin photographs, and a lecture by Prof. James Weirick on the GSDA shareholders that included politicians, Chinese investors and people from the arts.

More information in the next News Update

EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

- 21 March Scott Robertson talk on the conservation work at 'Griffin Lodge', the Stella James House at WBG Society general meeting
- 2 to 9 April Heritage Week
- 15 June to Sept Exhibition of 1913 competition entries for Canberra
See page 4 for details
- 26 to 30 June Urban History / Planning History Conference
See page 4
- July Talk by Anne Watson, Acting Senior Curator of Decorative Arts at Powerhouse Museum on 1996 international Griffin exhibition
- 3 Sept GSDA's 75th anniversary

GSDA No.1 Dwelling

from page 1

few alterations when it was auctioned in 1993 following the death of its owner who had lived there since 1947, the late Mrs Erna Klabe. Prior to the auction the Society alerted HHT to its significance and impending sale.

The Trust recognised the house's significance and also its fragility and vulnerability to unsympathetic development. It was with the encouragement of the Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Peter Collins and also with \$50,000 of financial assistance from Sydney City Council's Pyrmont Incinerator fund that HHT acquired GSDA No.1 Dwelling.

Since that time the Trust has done a conservation plan, had four public open days and many group viewings, restored the house, and built a new development adjacent to the house as a dual occupancy.

The conservation work has been extensive and has included the very important "invisible elements" of the roof, foundations and underfloor ventilation. More visible aspects of the conservation have been the restoration of the original stipple work on the walls in the entrance porch, living room and dining rooms. The restoration of the stipple involved the use of a poultice to remove the old paintwork to reveal the wonderful intense colours of the original stipple - yellows, ochres, olive green and ultramarine blue. The house's entrance porch was re-opened and in the process a newspaper dated in the 1940s was found in the wall which established when the entrance porch had been closed in. The delicately framed glass doors that open from the entrance porch into the rest of the house have been restored as have the three-plank pivot-hung doors and the original timber light fittings. The original kitchen cupboards above the bench with their glass fronts have been restored and the rest of the kitchen which was not original was replaced with a modern, somewhat controversial kitchen including all modern appliances. The bathroom which was not original either has been renovated also.

In the garden the large flat rock shelf protruding from under the house which was covered by a shallow retaining wall and grass in the 1940s has once again been revealed. Also the garage that was extended and built onto the house in the 1940s has been removed so that the house can once again be appreciated "in the round". This is where the controversial new dwelling designed by Bruce Rickard has been built.

The Society would have preferred that the house

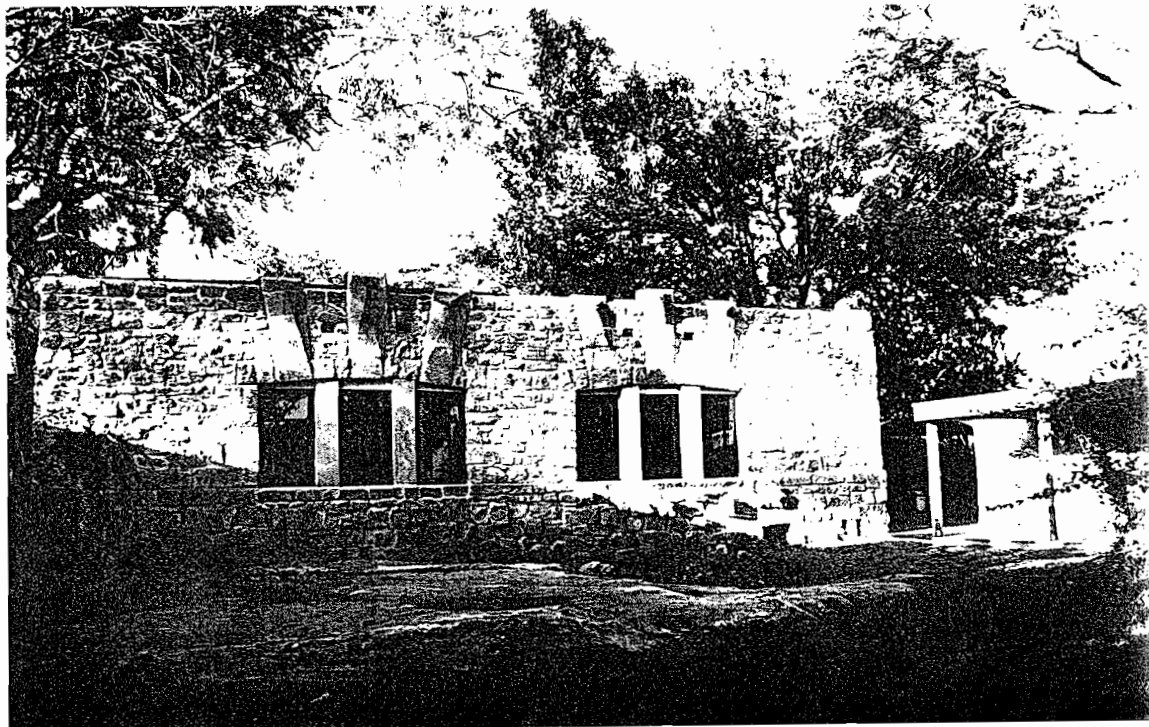
and its large garden remain intact without any development, but accepted that HHT could not financially afford this course of action. They needed to recoup their outlay of the purchase price and the \$100,000 plus spent on the restoration work. Additionally, as stated by the Trust in the Conservation Plan, "To ensure the long term conservation of the house and its special relationship with the Corteille Reserve and its neighbouring Griffin-designed house, No.140 Edinburgh Road, it was important that the development potential which threatened the house if left in its present modest form in a large garden, be sympathetically realised during the Trust's ownership, to eliminate future pressure for inappropriate development."

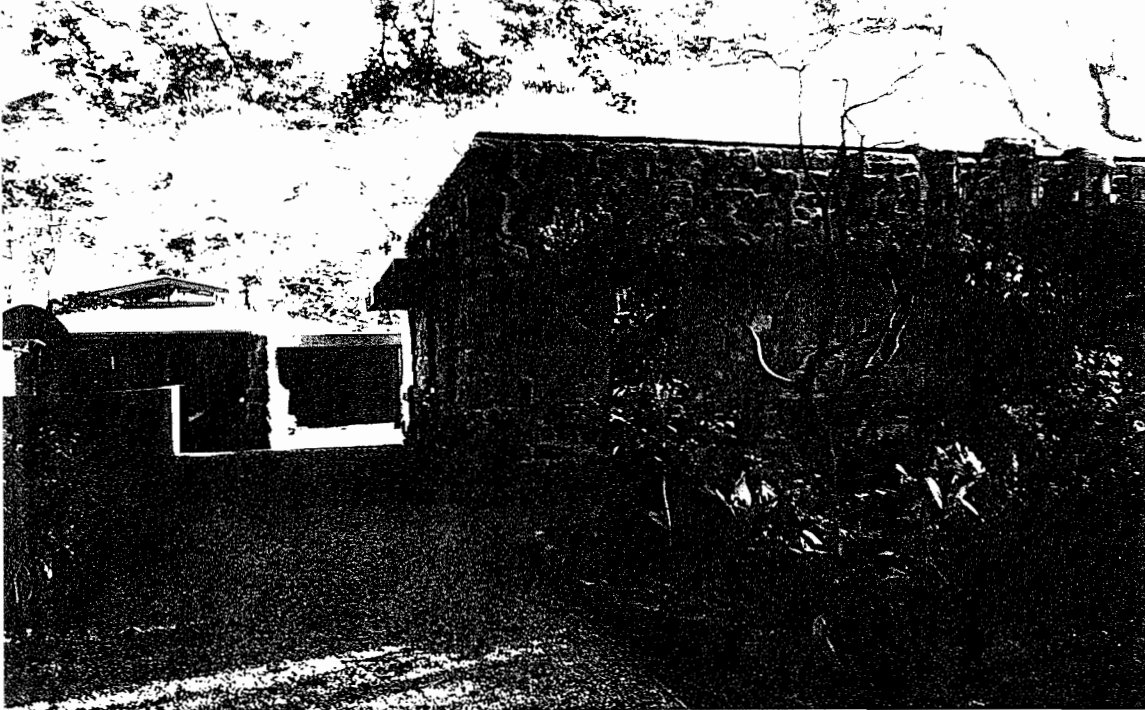
Thus the Trust commissioned Bruce Rickard to design a separate dwelling that was intended to be diminutive in scale and form to the Griffin house. While there were desirable aspects of the resulting design, the Society expressed concerns about the roof "lantern" which we believed was not diminutive in form but instead drew attention to itself between the flat roofs of GSDA No.1 and No.2 Dwellings.

Also we expressed concern about the dual occupancy and possible associated fences and stated that company title was preferable. HHT argued that for them to do a sympathetic dual occupancy now would prevent an unsympathetic dual occupancy in the future, since the Dual Occupancy Code overrides all other codes including Local Environment Plans.

Historic Houses Trust have embraced a bold new approach to heritage conservation and while we have reservations about the dual occupancy we commend them for their temporary acquisition for the purpose of restoration. We see this as a very worthwhile approach that can prevent the loss of our built heritage and hope that it is replicated many times over by both public authorities and private individuals.

Below : GSDA No.1 Dwelling and the rock on which it sits once again revealed.





Left : GSDA No.1 Dwelling with its re-opened entrance porch and the new dwelling built at the south east corner of the block.

Both dwellings will be auctioned on site on Saturday 25th February at 12.00 noon.

For further information contact The Professionals on 02 958 0124.

Marion Mahony Griffin: Antipodean pastoralism in the windy city.

Marion Mahony Griffin's talents are clearly evident in the superb drawings done for the Canberra competition. But as Anna Rubbo explained in her guest speech at the Society's AGM last October, Marion's talents were more far reaching and underpinned by a profound spiritualism and love of the environment.

Anna's talk centred around a wonderful mural Marion had painted in Chicago in 1931 that beautifully embodies Marion's involvement with spiritual, environmental and aesthetic issues and for which the talk was titled.

As Anna explained, Walter and Marion had big ideas and a great sense of vision all through their lives, but Marion has been underestimated because most published work has focussed on Walter Burley Griffin. Anna is presently writing a biography on Marion and so this imbalance will be rectified. Anna is going to Columbia University as a visiting scholar and will be using the Avery Library where many of Marion's drawings are kept.

Marion Lucy Mahony graduated in architecture from MIT in 1894. Her studies had been financed by Anna Wilmarth and from those early days she was absorbed by environmental and spiritual issues that featured in her life in almost a cyclical basis.

Marion worked first for her cousin, architect Dwight Perkins, who was also an ardent conservationist, and then she went on to work in Frank Lloyd Wright's office. She was the longest-serving member of Frank Lloyd Wright's office during his Prairie House years and if it had been a conventionally structured office she would have been chief designer. When Frank Lloyd Wright went to work for extended periods in Japan and later in Europe, Marion was left in charge of the office. In Wright's office she worked on many projects including the

Susan Laurence Dana House in Springfield, Illinois, and the studio home of sculptor Richard Bock in Oak Park. Later she was to carry on Wright's practice and carried some independent commissions, principally the Mueller Houses in Decatur, Illinois, for which Walter Burley Griffin landscaped the grounds and garden.

Her work in Wright's office demonstrated her democratic notion of community which was particularly well exemplified at the Como Orchards Summer colony near Darby, Montana, commissioned by a group of University of Chicago professors. Walter also worked in the Wright office from 1900 to 1905 and it was on 29th June 1911 that Marion and Walter married. Only a few months later they submitted their entry for the Canberra competition. Marion did all the drawings for the competition entry and they exhibit a very high degree of artistry, many in ink and watercolour on silk and many make use of reflection.

The interior of the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne is generally attributed to Marion.

In Marion's unpublished 1,000 page work *Magic of America* she writes that in 1930 she is "at the end of a great character testing decade". In November 1930 she returned to the USA for a prolonged stay and earlier that year she joined the Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy was founded by Rudolf Steiner and was all about a sense of freedom and concerned about the impact of materialism.

The mural that she painted at the Armstrong School in Chicago was done in 1931 for the graduating class of that year. Marion was living with her sister Geraldine who was teaching at the School and the headmistress invited Marion to do the mural. It still adorns the hallway wall at the school. Anna Rubbo visited it in 1993 when she was in the United States researching Marion.

The mural has a pastoral theme with nymphs and fairies and according to Anna has feeding herons at the water's edge. It is a sensual painting with an artistic treatment similar to paintings Marion did on silk of Castlecrag scenery of angophoras growing out of the rock cliffs leaning over the waters of Middle Harbour.

New committee for 1995

The new committee elected at the Society's AGM last October is as follows:

- President: Adrienne Kabos
- Vice president: James Weirick
- Treasurer: Brian Barnett
- Secretary: Kerry McKillop
- Committee: Max Bourke, David Dolan, Colleen Fry, Lisa Purser, Sue Randle, Howard Rubie, Akky Van Ogtrop, Trevor Waters.

We thank retiring committee member Kathy Lockhart and retiring secretary Ben Gerstel for his excellent assistance in 1993/94 and wish him well in his venture in 1995. We welcome new committee members Akky Van Ogtrop and David Dolan, who, since the AGM, has taken up the newly-created Chair of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Studies at the Curtin University, Perth. We congratulate him on his appointment as foundation Professor, but unfortunately it has meant he felt he had to resign from the committee because of the geographical distance! Fortunately though, Anne Watson, Acting Senior Curator of Decorative Arts at the Powerhouse Museum, who has taken over David's role as curator of the planned 1996 Griffin exhibition, has kindly agreed to fill the committee vacancy. So we gratefully welcome Anne.

Exhibition of 1913 Competition Entries for Canberra

This exhibition will open on 15th June at the National Library of Australia in Canberra and be on display for 3 months before being on exhibit at Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney and after that in Melbourne.

The exhibition will bring together materials held by the National Library, the Australian Archives and international collections not seen in public since 1913.

To coincide with the exhibition the Australian National University is organising a major Urban History / Planning History Conference to take place at the Manning Clark Centre in the ANU from 26th to 30th June 1995. The conference will cover major aspects of the history of Australian cities, especially in the twentieth century. For further information contact Penelope Hanley on tel. 06 249 3293 or fax. 06 249 0312.

Building for nature: Walter Burley Griffin and Castlecrag

The Society's book, published last year, is enjoying wide success and favourable acclaim. It is available from selected bookshops including the National Trust and RAA's bookshops, the National Library bookshop in Canberra. The Arts Bookshop, Readings and the Art Salon in Melbourne. It is also available from The Secretary, W B Griffin Society Inc, 140 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag 2068 (Phone 02 958 4516 or fax 02 958 8687) for \$25 and \$4 postage and packaging.

■ **MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS**

- Individual \$15.00 PA
- Community Organizations \$100.00 PA
- Business Organizations \$ 500.00 PA

[Applicants agree to accept the objects and rules of the Society]

NAME

ADDRESS.....

TELEPHONE.....DATE.....

■ **DONATIONS** [Tax Deductible]

- \$.....
- \$ 50
- \$ 100
- \$ 200
- \$.....

Please make cheques payable to : Walter Burley Griffin Society Incorporated
Send to: The Secretary, 12 The Parade, CASTLECRAIG NSW 2068 AUSTRALIA