

News Update

January 1997

Happy New Year!

Best wishes to all our members for 1997. The new year gets off to an interesting start with a **Harbour Cruise** organised for February and a **Discovery Tour** in April. See details below.

Middle Harbour Cruise

To commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Walter Burley Griffin's death and one of his greatest legacies - the protection of 6.5km of Middle Harbour foreshores - we invite you to a cruise of Sydney Harbour and the foreshores of Middle Harbour with a fascinating commentary by Professor James Weirick, on **Tuesday 11 February 1997, 4.30 to 9pm**. The cruise will be on board the graceful 95-year-old *Lady Hopetoun* which has been lovingly restored by volunteers of the Sydney Maritime Museum. Built in Balmain in 1902 and named after the wife of the first Governor General of Australia, she served as the VIP launch for the State Government for many years and is a classic example of Edwardian grace and style. Numbers are strictly limited so please book early. For further information and application form see the enclosed invitation.

Discovery Tour

A very early work from Griffin's Australian practice, a lost fragment from the Canberra drawings realised in the landscape in Sydney, has recently been discovered by Professor James Weirick. A bus tour to visit this work and other items of interest in the Griffin story will be held **Sunday 13 April 1997, 1.45pm to 5.30pm**. Further information and application form in March newsletter.

Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996

An exhibition bringing together paintings, photographs, sculptures and drawings by over 100 artists including three pieces by Walter and Marion Griffin. At Museum of Contemporary Art until March.

Willoughby Incinerator Restoration

The Walter Burley Griffin incinerator in Small Street Willoughby has been described as a building of highest quality and international significance. Professor James Weirick sketched the history and heritage significance of the incinerator in a lecture to the Walter Burley Griffin Society's Annual General Meeting at the incinerator on 28 October 1996.

A Heritage Impact Assessment of the former incinerator has been prepared by Grahame Brooks following a serious fire in July 1996 which destroyed the roof and internal fittings of the building. The Willoughby incinerator, built in 1934 to the design of Griffin and Eric Nicholls for the Reverberatory Incinerator and Engineering Company, fell into disuse by the 1960s. Despite local pressure for its demolition, its social, technological and architectural significance was recognised by several local residents, including David Turner of Castlecrag, who lobbied for its restoration. The National Trust classified it in 1970 and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects included it on their list of significant 20th century buildings in 1973. >>>>>

Colin Dilworth approached Willoughby Council to restore the building as a restaurant in 1980. This was approved and the building, restored with the assistance of the NSW Heritage Council, reopened in 1982. Much of the internal equipment was removed in this process and alterations made to the internal floors and stairs. The restaurant became a victim of economic pressure in 1988 and was subsequently converted to an office complex.

Grahame Brooks has provided an interim statement of the heritage significance of the building. It is listed on the Register of the National Estate, indicating it is an item of national significance, it is listed as an item of state significance under Willoughby Council's LEP 73 and has a permanent Conservation Order by the Heritage Council of NSW.

The building's significance is based on historic, aesthetic, social and scientific grounds. Historically, the incinerator is associated with the efforts of local governments on the eastern Australian seaboard to tackle waste management problems through the adoption of new technology. Aesthetically, the building is the best surviving example of Griffin's industrial work, expressing a marvellous architectural composition which makes maximum advantage of the hillside setting. Socially, the incinerator was formerly held in low esteem by local residents who called it the *Instinkerator*, but recognition of its architectural significance and subsequent restoration has generated such a sense of pride that Willoughby City has received acclaim for saving the building. This is reinforced by the dramatic visual backdrop the building provides to the adjacent parklands. Scientifically, the industrial plant represented an important response to new techniques for incinerating waste.

Professor Weirick noted that while the fire was a tragedy for this heritage building, it provides an opportunity for reconstruction to sound conservation principles. While the efforts to save the building over the past 25 years were heroic in changing the attitudes of city aldermen to save the building, and investing is a risky business, the work was not done in the context of the type of conservation study we would expect today. The internal industrial technology fabric of the building was changed for other uses, significant changes were made to the southern facade and the original Griffin smokestack was significantly truncated. However, the preliminary assessment by Grahame Brooks provides a starting point for a quality restoration of this most significant building.

GSDA 1928 Castlecrag Film on Video

The film *Beautiful Middle Harbour*, made in 1928 to promote Castlecrag Estate, is included in a selection of silent films, *Keepin' Silent*, recently released by the National Film & Sound Archives. The films represent the silent era from 1896 onwards and the video contains rare and entertaining material from Australia's Film Heritage.

Beautiful Middle Harbour is presented in full, running for almost 12 minutes. It promotes the Castlecrag Estate as a place to live within a natural bush environment. Scenes include:

- extensive views of Middle Harbour through bushland;
- views of stone houses and community activities, including Marion Griffin serving tea to a group of women and a large public gathering on the roof of the *Mower House*;
- the Suspension Bridge between Northbridge and Cammeray;
- the Castlecrag shops, with a bus departing for Willoughby;
- street scenes in The Parapet and The Bastion;
- foreshore scenes of the Castlecrag Peninsula with a steam launch/ferry;
- community scenes on the foreshore, including canoeing (an excellent shot of Walter Burley Griffin), picnics and fishing;
- Walter Burley Griffin and GSDA directors inspecting plans for future development;
- the foreshore public reserves around which it was proposed to construct a 12-mile Marine Drive;
- a performance at the Amphitheatre beside the harbour with a dance routine believed to be performed by Louise Lightfoot and Misha Burkalov.

Keepin' Silent is available from the National Sales Office, National Film & Sound Archive, GPO Box 2002, Canberra ACT 2601 (Tel 06 209 3006; Fax 06 209 3165) or Australian Government Publishing shops at \$29.95, plus handling and postage.

Pakie's Club and the Griffins

The death of Robin Macdougall in December 1996 at the age of 89 closed another chapter in the life of the Griffins and the early Castlecrag community. The obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 December describes Macdougall as an energetic figure in Sydney's bohemian life between and after the wars. His father, Duncan Macdougall, was an actor and producer and ran the Playbox Theatre, the sign for which was designed by Griffin, in Rowe Street, Sydney. The Playbox Theatre introduced Sydneysiders to many avant-garde playwrights and Castlecrag was frequently advertised on the back of the Playbox programs.

Robin helped his mother, August *Pakie* Macdougall, establish *Pakie's Club* at 219 Elizabeth Street, overlooking Hyde Park, in 1929. The Club and tearoom served "primarily for a rendezvous for artists and writers, but also for appreciators and their friends" (*The Wentworth Magazine*, August 1929). Robin Macdougall worked at *Pakie's* in the evenings and, following his mother's tragic death in 1945, kept the establishment going for another 20 years.

Walter and Marion Griffin were close friends of *Pakie* Macdougall and she called on their talents to help with setting up *Pakie's Club*. It was reported that "Mr Griffin lent his talent to the planning of the room" (*Ibid.*, p.20), and artist Roy de Mestre was also involved with the decor.

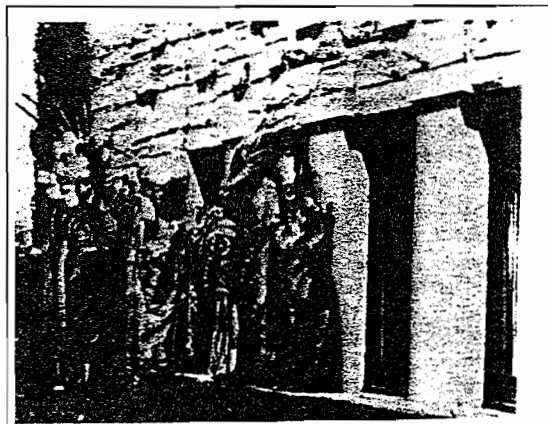
Apparently the Griffins were regulars amongst the bohemian crowd who frequented *Pakie's*. Florence Hagelthorn wrote of her visit there in 1932 with Mrs Gilmore and her introduction to Walter Burley Griffin. She described *Pakie's* as "one of the most delightful little cafes one could imagine. It is really in the nature of a club for the literary and artistic genre, and has all the air of intimacy that is the charm of such resorts, that are more frequently met with in books than in real life." (*The Catholic Leader: Brisbane*, 10 March 1932).

The women were joined "by a little man with fair hair and a contagious smile and an American accent whom *Pakie* addressed as "Walter".. And then Mrs Gilmore got him [WBG] to talk about Newman and Canberra, so that I could write about them later." (*Ibid.*) Walter, it seems, was in an expansive mood and was soon telling the little group about art and his ideas for the development of a national architecture. To Miss Hagelthorn's query on architecture in Australia, he responded:

It practically doesn't exist. Architecture should express the spirit, the soul of the period, and of the nation. The architecture of five hundred years ago expresses the soul of the Middle Ages. The Gothic Style, which developed after the Crusades, added the warmth of the Orient to the austerity of the Classic form, and much inspiration and richness. Like all the best architecture, it is founded on the Classic Style. But there is the awakening to come, 'Durch schaden wirt man klug', you know. And I realized that he meant the dawn of a spiritual and artistic renaissance was at hand, in which Australia will arise Phoenix-like from the ashes of mediocrity to a glorious fame in literature, art, music and, yes, in architecture. May it be not far off, and may we all be here to see it!

On Marion's voyage back to Sydney via Melbourne from India following Walter's death, *Pakie* met Marion in Melbourne and accompanied her on the last stage of the voyage to Sydney in May 1937, on the P & O *Chitral*. On Marion's return and until her departure for the United States a year or two later, Marion and *Pakie* lived in the *Mower House*, the knitlock house in The Rampart, Castlecrag.

Pakie's Club closed in 1966 and the building which housed it was demolished for a non-descript office tower. Robin Macdougall retired to a quieter life in Beecroft, to the house he commissioned Eric Nicholls to design and build for him in the early 1950s.



Marion and Walter Griffin (first and second from left) dressed as Mayan gods for a Mexican Night at *Pakie's*. Photograph published in *Walter Burley Griffin: a Re-view*.

A Farewell to Friedel

Friedel Souhami, long-time resident of the *Cheong House*, Castlecrag, died last October aged 96.

Frieda Christiane Hedwig Hoffman was born in Meissen, Germany, in 1899, and with her husband Manfred and daughter Renate, came to Australia in February 1939 as Jewish refugees. They lived at first in Willoughby, and then hearing from Frank Duncan (whom they met through the Sydney Bushwalkers) about a Castlecrag house being available to rent, moved to the *Cheong House* in The Parapet in 1940. At the time there were only six houses in the street including the four Griffin ones. For the duration of the war, beside the *Cheong House*, there was an army petrol depot with soldiers permanently stationed there in tents.

Despite being refugees, the Souhami family were considered aliens by the Australian authorities and subjected to numerous hardships, including reporting to the local police station weekly, several house searches, travel restrictions to places of work and basic shopping only (the city was beyond limits to Friedel even when she needed to buy a pair of shoes), and the authorities also prevented aliens from buying property. Thus a group of the Souhamis' friends got together and purchased the house for them. When the Labor Government won power in 1942 the house was transferred into their own names.

After the war when Friedel was able to re-establish contact with her civil engineer brother Rudolf Hoffman, she discovered that although she had never heard of Walter Burley Griffin before she moved to the *Cheong House*, her brother had been familiar with Griffin's work for many years through the *Osterreichs Bau-und Werkkunst* by Richard Neutra which was the only publication of Griffin's Australian work outside Australia and included photos of some of the Castlecrag houses.

In Germany, Friedel had worked as a social worker but in Australia she did cleaning during the war and until 1949 when she discovered her great gift as a German teacher. She taught at the *Berlitz Language School* and later at the *Inlingua Language School* in Sydney for 36 years until her retirement at age 85.

The Souhamis became involved in the Castlecrag community early on. They were active in the fundraising for and building of the Community Centre and assisted in establishing the library, where Manfred spent many hours cataloguing books in the Dewey System.

Friedel had a great interest in architecture and German modernism. The *Bauhaus* furniture she and her husband brought with them from Germany complemented Griffin's interiors, especially that of the lounge room with its dominating fireplace mass of sawn sandstone. Friedel was always a wonderful hostess and would welcome her many visitors, students and friends into her beloved lounge room, where conversation was always exhilarating and covered a wide range of subjects from politics to Griffin's architectural strengths and weaknesses.

Friedel is survived by her daughter Renate, son-in-law Arthur, grandsons Owen and Neil and great grandchildren Peri, Brady and Tayla.

The Society is very grateful to Renate who has given the original Bernard Hesling illustrated map of Castlecrag, which hung on Friedel's walls, to the Society. We feel greatly honoured by this wonderful gift. A feature of the map is Friedel's fabulous beetroot salad!

New Committee

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

President:	Adrienne Kabos
Vice president:	James Weirick
Treasurer:	Maggie Chambers
Secretary:	Kerry McKillop
Committee:	Carick Chambers, Colleen Fry, John McInemey, Sue Randle, Anna Rubbo, Howard Rubie, Akky van-Ogtrop, Anne Watson.

We thank retiring committee members Max Bourke and John Kabos for all their help and support. Max Bourke is a foundation member and has given wonderful assistance over the last eight years since the Society's inception. John Kabos is also a foundation member and for the past year has been the Society's treasurer. We thank Maggie Chambers for taking over the position of treasurer and welcome new committee member Professor Carick Chambers, recently retired director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, and Colleen Fry, Head of Art at PLC School.