

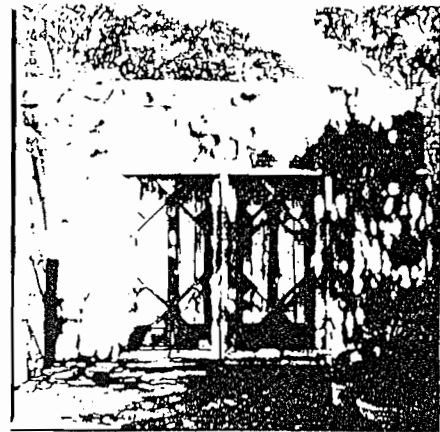
News Update

November 1993

"House of the Seven Lanterns" Auction

This beautifully intact two bedroomed Knitlock house designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1926 at 4 The Barbette Castlecrag is to be auctioned on site at 12 noon on Saturday 27th November. Inspection times are on Wednesdays and Saturdays 12-1pm. The Real Estate agent is The Professionals, Castlecrag 958 0124.

The house was the first of three small houses built at the top of the ridge in The Barbette with staggered setbacks, to allow views past one another to Middle Harbour.



Photograph by Tracy Gilling

Records suggest that the house was initiated by Mrs A E Creswick, a member of the Theosophical Society who lived in Burwood. She placed a deposit on the land, but the sale did not proceed, and it is unlikely that she had a significant input into the design. In 1929, when the house was completed, the first registered owners were Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin.

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Work in Progress Open Day: 28th November

Historic Houses Trust will be opening GSDA No.1 Dwelling at 136 Edinburgh Road Castlecrag on Sunday 28th November from 10am to 4pm so that the restoration work in progress, begun about six weeks ago, can be viewed by the public. Admission will be \$2.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society will be organising afternoon tea which will be available from 2pm to 4pm.

DA/BA Submission for GSDA No.1 Dwelling

A Development Application and Building Application have been lodged by Historic Houses Trust at Willoughby City Council for a detached dual occupancy and subdivision of GSDA No.1 Dwelling. Plans and details are available for inspection at the Council Chambers, 4th Floor, 411 Victoria Avenue, Chatswood for a fourteen day period. All submissions must be in writing and lodged by Monday 29th November 1993.

"House of Seven Lanterns"

Frank Duncan and Marion Griffin each lived in this house in the 1930s. Since then there have been three owners. In 1953, Mrs Rogers bought the house for herself and her daughter, who continues to live there; and prior to that it was owned by Mr Stipwicz for many years.

The house is an exercise in using Knitlock, with a flat roof, to create a compact and efficient house. Based on the 4 foot (1.2m) knitlock module, four corner rooms are clustered together, joined by kitchen, bathroom and passage – with lower ceilings emphasising the spaciousness of the rooms. Knitlock buttresses at the corners allow french doors on either side, with the result that each room is filled with light, and three have light from three directions – like bay windows across the full width of the rooms. The siting and design makes the house seem much larger than its 928 sq ft (9 sq metres).

The house retains its original form, free from new rooms and services. The only addition is a small timber deck outside the kitchen, where the owners have fed generations of kookaburras, lorikeets, rosellas and currawongs. The cupboards and other fittings remain, (through regular use and good housekeeping), in good condition. Their design demonstrates the abilities of the Griffin office to accommodate the traditional features of freestanding furniture into built-in cupboards.

Like the Mower house in The Rampart, the owners have experienced problems with the water penetrating the roof and with dampness in the Knitlock walls. To further combat dampness, Bondcrete was applied to the walls in the 1960s, and more recently they have been covered with Emaclad, which partially obscures the pattern of the Knitlock. In characteristic romantic fantasy, the Griffins named this "The House of the Seven Lanterns", probably a reference to knitlock pillars that projected above the parapet, but removed to reduce the transmission of damp through the walls. Excepting these changes, the house is remarkably intact. Unlike other Knitlock houses, it retains all its original doors and windows and the majority of its joinery, including the pass-through pantry and cupboards all in working order. It also retains many of the original pull cord light switches, inserted when the electricity supply was extended to The Barquette, c 1935, before which gas was used. The outstanding condition of the Creswick house is a testimony to the appreciation of the house by its owner-occupants of the past forty years.

A steel carport has been added, but (unlike other houses) the house is still entered through the front door, which is approached through a garden, developed from the remnant native vegetation. Miss Rogers has kept the beautiful garden with its characteristic stone paths and partly native and partly exotic vegetation which includes an angophora, eucalypts, a magnificent lily pilli tree, large area of maidenhair fern and wonderful beds of azaleas. The garden is very much in sympathy with the Griffin concept with only a small area of lawn immediately around the house and the garden merging imperceptibly with the garden of the adjoining Griffin house and also with the roadside verge.

The house is set about two-thirds of the way back on its block which just beyond the house drops down to a lower level and the foreshore reserve free from fences and other structures with a lawn area and magnificent bushland. The property is an outstanding combination of a house and landscape.

Written by Meredith Walker, Heritage Consultant, and Adrienne Kabos.



Photograph courtesy of Frank Duncan showing three of the original Knitlock lanterns.

Half Heritage Hamburger

Wingecarribee Council resolved on 20th September to approve the DA for the demolition of the former Mittagong Council Chambers designed by Eric Nicholls, and the building of a McDonalds in its place. The Society wrote to the Council in early August requesting the preservation of this culturally and historically significant building of great architectural merit at the focal point of Mittagong and sent a similar letter to the *Southern Highlands News* which was published in that paper.

Despite considerable community opposition including nearly 150 letters, National Trust advice to preserve the building and an excellent article highlighting the heritage significance of the building in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Council decided to approve the DA to demolish the Nicholls' architecture but restore the adjoining Memorial Hall and School of Arts. It seems the only reason for the differentiation is that the Nicholls building (Council Chambers) was built 40 years ago while the other two buildings are nearly 100 years old. It is about time that our regulators, such as local governments, give significant architecture its due respect no matter what its age instead of leaving it to good luck alone for its preservation through the first ten decades. McDonalds have demonstrated at their North Sydney and George Street, Sydney, restaurants that they can recycle old buildings. So we hope they restore the Nicholls' building as well as the School of Arts and Memorial Hall, or perhaps they wish to go down in history as demolishers of fine architecture – but we hope not.

The Mittagong Townscape Association (MTA), a community organisation set up two years ago, point out in their latest newsletter that there is already "an overabundance of fast food shops adjusting to the bypass" in Mittagong. Last April the MTA launched their proposal for the three heritage buildings including community uses and shops. This is being developed further because there is hope in the community that the cost of restoring the School of Arts may be more than even McDonalds wants to pay. We wish them well in their work towards preserving Nicholls' Council Chambers.

The Winter House

This was a very special and wonderful venue for the Society's AGM last month. The many members and friends who attended the meeting were all enthused by this wonderful house designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1935 for the Winter family, and its beautiful large garden.

Paul Melchert, architect and grandson of the original owner, gave a fascinating talk about the house which was originally set amongst dairy farms and orchards (there is one remaining plum tree) with views down to the Parramatta River but these have since been built out. Paul pointed out that the roof is a particularly interesting solution to the client's requirement for a pitched roof. The stone for the house came from the nearby quarry in Robert Street. The house is superbly maintained with many of the original finishes specified by Griffin still being used including the wax for the secret nailed cypress flooring and the sump oil for the exterior barge boards around the roof giving them a magnificent dark brown lustrous sheen. Nearly every detail in the house is still intact including the unusual decorative recessed lighting in each room and the kitchen cupboards, draining rack and specially fabricated double stainless steel sink with swivel tap (real innovations for the 1930s).

Mr and Mrs Charles Melchert are to be congratulated and warmly thanked for the wonderful care they have given and continue to give to this superb Griffin architecture. We also thank them for their generosity in allowing the Society to hold its AGM in their beautiful garden and so kindly showing everyone through their delightful home.

New Committee

The new committee elected at the AGM is as follows: president, Adrienne Kabos; vice president, James Weirick; treasurer, Brian Barnett; secretary, Ben Gerstel; committee members, Max Bourke, Colleen Fry, Cathy Lockhart, Kerry McKillop, Lisa Purser, Sue Randle, Howard Rubie and Trevor Waters.

We thank retiring committee members Marcella Cerna and Eric Kaye for all their help and support over the past few years. Eric is a founding committee member who has been on the committee since its inception in 1988. We also welcome the two new committee members Cathy Lockhart and Councillor Sue Randle who is also a founding committee member but who retired for a couple of years, so it is great to have her back!

Willoughby's Heritage Future: Evening Seminar

Was organised by four community groups (Walter Burley Griffin Society, Art Deco Society, Willoughby Environmental Protection Association and Willoughby Historical Society) on 9th November at the Dougherty Centre, Chatswood, and was attended by over 120 people including a number of council officers and Councillors Randle, Weingarth, Ciantar, Dally, Lamb, Morgan and Deputy Mayor Cr. Raymond.

The aim of the seminar was to provide a forum for discussion on the natural, Aboriginal and built environment and to assist Willoughby City Council in the fine tuning of their Draft LEP that will shortly be on display for public comment.

Heritage Consultant, Meredith Walker, chaired the seminar that had a panel of five outstanding speakers. Val Attenbrow of the Australian Museum spoke of the 114 registered Aboriginal sites in Willoughby (on the NPWS Register in March 1993), which represent about an eighth of the sites in the Sydney metropolitan area. Dr Attenbrow said that Willoughby City had two complexes of sites and that they were very important, and recommended that they be nominated for the Register of the National Estate. Judy Messer of the Nature Conservation Council provided an excellent account of the importance of conserving our environmental heritage, particularly Willoughby's 250 hectares of urban bushland, as well as the need to protect our air and water quality. She highlighted the legal and economic responsibility of councils to protect open space, waterways and bushland through strong controls on any development in adjoining areas. In relation to Council expenditure, she said it was interesting to note that 80% of Council open space was bushland but that it receives only 9% of the funds allocated to open space.

Muriel Ryan commended the residential 2a(2) zone in the Draft LEP and spoke of the need for new DCPs for heritage and land adjoining bushland.

James Weirick spoke of the great value of the *suburban forest* and highlighted the Griffin heritage of Castlecrag as "Willoughby's feature of international significance." Protection of this heritage requires a community that loves its environment, wide understanding of heritage values in the community and "a lasting community activism" which ensures that the valued items are protected and cared for. Community needs should be integrated within the decision making structure of the Council, perhaps via citizen committees, like Leichhardt Council. While a stronger protection of environment theme is now evident in urban planning and management, the landscape is under threat from policies of urban consolidation.

David Logan, Manager of Urban Heritage at Sydney City Council, gave an excellent illustrated presentation of both sympathetic and outlandish alterations to houses and infill in the Artarmon and Chatswood conservation areas. He believes that Heritage DCPs should go on exhibition at the same time as the LEP. He also believes the character of an area can be retained by careful management by Council with community support.

The new Environmental Services Director of Willoughby City Council, Greg Woodhams, explained that the display of the Draft LEP had been delayed because of concerns about the zoning of the Naremburn and Castlecrag School sites, that Council was concerned not to delay the heritage provisions and that there is a new spirit of change in the Council – one of partnership with the community.

In discussing and summing up Meredith Walker, the chair, suggested that a structure or process might be created which would allow the community to discuss concerns with Council. This would be in addition to formal written submissions, and would be far more productive, allowing Council and community to come to a preferred approach.

Walter Burley Griffin Search

Walter Burley Griffin, the designer of Canberra, also designed many houses, shops and land subdivisions in Australia from 1913–1937. Peter Navaretti, Research Assistant at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, University of Melbourne, is attempting to compile an inventory of all Griffin's work and is keen to contact anyone who has in their keeping photos, drawings, letters or other documents of Griffin–designed buildings or subdivisions, even if these materials are about a project that was never built. If you can help please telephone Peter Navaretti on (03) 344–4231 (Mon–Fri) or write to Faculty of Architecture and Planning, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052.

International Griffin Exhibition:

A First Progress Report from David Dolan, Senior Curator, Powerhouse Museum

Earlier this year I travelled to the USA to study Griffin buildings in the Chicago area, and take part in meetings of the Griffin Exchange Program at the University of Illinois. The cost of my travel was met by the Australian Embassy in Washington, and its purpose was to link the research of the Griffin Exchange Program, which also involves the University of Melbourne, with the international touring Griffin exhibition being developed by the Powerhouse Museum for 1996-7.

The main aim of the exhibition is to increase public awareness of the Griffins, in order to create a climate of opinion which will ensure that their remaining buildings here and in the USA are preserved and protected. We believe that if enough people understood the importance of their work, further demolition and unsympathetic alteration would be socially and politically unacceptable.

Funding for the exhibition has come from the Council of the City of Sydney, in the context of the demolition of the Pymont Incinerator-- the same source which topped up State Government funds to enable the Historic Houses Trust to purchase "Dwelling number one" at Castlecrag. The loss of the Pymont Incinerator was a tragedy. Hopefully the exhibition will help ensure it can never happen again. Never before has there been sufficient funding for a Griffin exhibition on this scale, and it is unlikely that comparable funding will become available again in the foreseeable future. The 1996-7 exhibition can therefore be regarded as the definitive Griffin exhibition for our times, and we are hoping for unanimous co-operation so we can get it right.

In the context of the exhibition, the Powerhouse has accepted the responsibility of being the chief repository for Griffin material in Australia. This means ensuring that all such material is properly conserved and safely stored to avoid deterioration. In addition to acquiring the remnants of the Pymont Incinerator, the Powerhouse has begun an active acquisition program. In two separate gifts from members of Griffin's client's family, we recently received the perspective drawing, and house and garden plan, (both on linen) for the 1933 Cameron House at Killara.

Members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society who support the aims of the exhibition can assist by contacting me on 2170280 to tell me of any items of interest they may be aware of, especially if they might be available for loan to the exhibition, or could be acquired by the Museum for documentation, conservation and permanent safe keeping.

It would be regrettable if this aspect of our heritage was dispersed or allowed to deteriorate, now that funds and facilities exist to safeguard it. It is important to understand that this process is not a one-way street: Griffin material acquired by the Powerhouse could be available for loan in future years to other institutions and Griffin museums which might be established.

From the Grapevine

The Australian Archives newsletter *Grapevine* describes the past and recent conservation of the surviving Federal Capital Design Competition drawings (the prize-winning entries). The newsletter states that "in 1995 our organisation and the National Library of Australia will collaborate on a major Australian exhibition on the Federal Capital Design Competition, involving the display of most or all of the extant early drawings". Thank you to Margaret Chambers for bringing this to our attention. More details re the drawings and the conservation work, in the next News Update.

BEST WISHES This is the last newsletter for 1993 so we wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.



Afternoon Tea GSDA No.1 Dwelling 1st August '93