

News Update *October 1995*

Griffin Festival 27th August 1995:

The weather was kind to us on Sunday 27th August and large crowds arrived to take part in the various activities organised for the day. Thank you to all who attended - members of the Society, former and present residents of Castlecrag, one or two contemporaries of the Griffins, members of the heritage and architecture communities, and those wanting to learn more about the Griffins - we hope you enjoyed the experience. Many many thanks to those who helped with the organisation and smooth running of the day, especially members of the Society and those from Willoughby City Council, whose help was invaluable. Mayor John Squire and David Marr gave witty and instructive addresses to open the Festival, as did David Moore, colleague of Max Dupain, who opened the Exhibition of the Society's collection of Max Dupain photographs, so kindly donated to the Society, and other photographs lent by Diana Dupain. A very big thank you to the Van-Ogtrops for providing their studio for the Exhibition, and to the owners of the Griffin houses who opened their homes for inspection.

The addresses by David Marr and David Moore have been summarised, and with their permission we are reproducing them for your interest:

Official Opening by David Marr

This is a week for confessions and I should commence with a confession of my own - I grew up in Pymble. Every Sunday when I was a kid, my parents sent me off to Sunday School. The walk between our house and Sunday School was a fascinating one through the landscape of Pymble. Right at the very end, you passed one of the Pratten houses which Burley Griffin built in Telegraph Road. That house for me was a continuous, mysterious and self-assured presence; this calm building which explained nothing of itself. It was just there, finished and beautiful. Its refusal to explain and charm gave the house great power - it was the foreign part of Pymble. It was indeed the only part of Pymble which suggested there was an outside world.

I was surprised to read in Peter Harrison's book that Griffin got no pleasure from building the two great Pratten houses. He got more pleasure from building the unostentatious domestic retreats of Castlecrag. Even at this distance I feel a twinge of jealousy.

Later I lived in Balmain, which meant that on bus journeys to and from work I passed the Pymont Incinerator. When I was first working on *The Bulletin*, the Incinerator was still complete and a gloriously beautiful and imaginatively perfect thing - one of the three most perfectly sited buildings in Sydney. The shame of its departure will live with this city for a very long time. It has gone and has been replaced by one of the ugliest block of flats built in human history.

Here today we are celebrating survivals and we are celebrating Walter Burley Griffin. It is easy to write a biography of Griffin and of Marion Mahony and to say that they were another couple of harvested tall poppies - that they came to this country and that their vision was misunderstood, and they left broken and "we did it to them", just as we did later to Utzern. It is perfectly possible to construct that biography. >>>>>>>>

I would like to suggest in opening today's proceedings another biography for them. The Griffins came here as foreigners and with foreign imagination and I love them for that. Of course they were completely dotty when they arrived. Remember their plans to plant each hill in Canberra with a different coloured bush - there was going to be a pink hill and a blue hill and a white hill? But the wonderful thing about this country was that we showed them how this country should be looked at - it ended with Marion Mahony Griffin standing somewhere on Edinburgh Road waving here arms about and saying "Walter and I want all this bush to remain virgin bush"!

We see this country now and see the possibilities of cities in this country through the eyes of the Burley Griffins. They were foreign eyes which came here and showed us what was possible. In recognising the wonderful work of the Walter Burley Griffin Society in holding things together

here, and not denying the important things which home-grown talent does all the time, I think today might be an occasion when we also "dips our lid" just a little to the foreigners who come and show us what is possible.

This suburb is, frankly, a failure - it is not what the Griffins wanted, it is not what might have been here. I am very glad to hear now from Willoughby Council some enthusiasm for a subdivision and a town and a place which they fought so bitterly to begin with. I am very glad that the stumps of what might have been a great forest survive here. But this is not what it might have been. What it is, however, is a wonderful reminder of what is possible in this country when something absolutely new and unexpected, and calm and original and quite dotty, comes here and builds. It is for that that I would like to honour the 75th anniversary of this subdivision, and declare it open.

Opening by David Moore of the Exhibition of Max Dupain Photographs

I think what we are looking at here is a convergence of talents: the visionary talent of Walter Burley Griffin and the talent of Max Dupain who forty years later photographed the Griffin houses - the bringing together of two great creative artists.

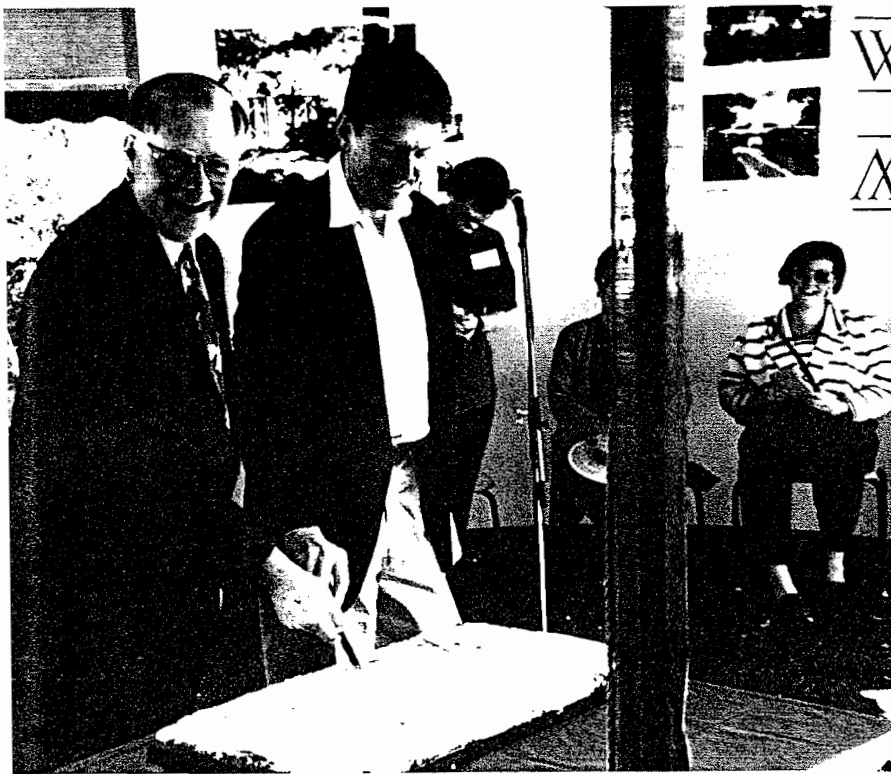
Griffin set up the Greater Sydney Development Association to preserve the landscape of Castlecrag. This was done in a clever way - shares were issued to members, but Griffin held controlling shares and was a benign dictator. Griffin imported a United States design philosophy to Castlecrag - he was adventurous, influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, but his buildings retained a human scale which is so important for domestic architecture, sometimes lost sight of today when buildings are too grand for the individual. Also, his buildings have a fortress quality which is fascinating to me. Griffin had looked at the rocks which we have around this area of Sydney, and the flatness of the rocks had importance to him. This was reflected in his hatred of pitched tiled roofs which were the Sydney norm in the 1920s. However, flat roofs put him in conflict with the authorities of the time, as they have done for later architects.

These photographs possess the Dupain style or signature. Having had the privilege of working with Max in the 1940s, I am conscious that no-one does pictures of architecture as stylistic and beautiful and relevant as Dupain did in his time. Architecture was one of his great loves. That came from understanding and mastery of light combined with understanding of what architecture is. It is interesting to me that photographs are often seen as documentary evidence but are in fact a process of abstraction - by taking a 3-dimensional subject and making it two-dimensional, then by taking out colour, further abstracting.

In this exhibition they go further than this. Two of the pictures in this exhibition are quite surreal - using the human figure. Why did he pose the human figures in the way he did? It is almost as though the house has just finished a great sea voyage and land is in sight! Max had immense technical virtuosity plus graphic precision. He was very concerned with the architectural drawing of any building and would respect that highly, whether using straight elevation or perspective eg the picture looking through the window to the fireplace. Contrast this with the pictures of the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne, which are almost like looking into a minute crystal, seeing the complexity of the interior as designed by Griffin and as expressed by Dupain.

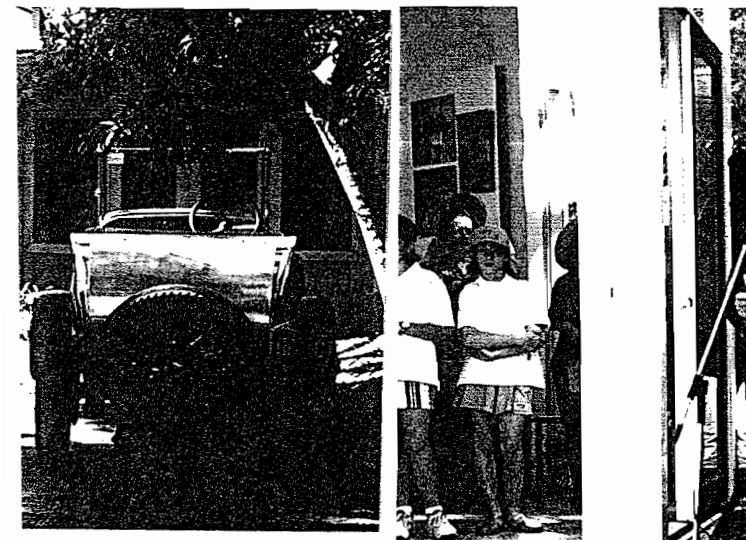
This collection is a most important group of images and will become more important for future generations. I think the State Library of NSW is the perfect place for the photographs to be housed, as is planned by the Society - to have these pictures kept in archival conditions is of such importance to all of us. It is a privilege and a joy for me to open this exhibition as part of the Griffin Festival, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the beginnings of Castlecrag.

WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN
FESTIVAL
 MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN



Above: Mayor of Willoughby City Council, Cr John Squire and guest speaker David Marr cut GSDA's 75th birthday cake at the official opening of the Griffin Festival.

Right: Piper, Graham Wood and committee members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Cr Sue Randle and Howard Rubie at the opening of the photographic exhibition.

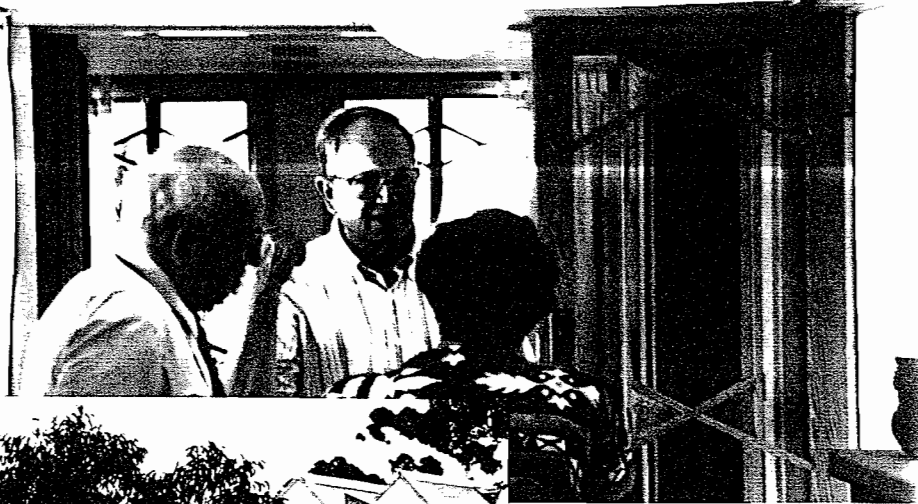


Above left: vintage participant in the Festival, 1925 Morris Cowley.

Above: David Moore officially opens the exhibition of Max Dupain photos of Griffin architecture.

Left: from L. to R. Ann Jackson; Elsa Atkin, Executive Director of the National Trust; Adrienne Kabos, President of the Walter Burley Griffin Society; Akky Van Ogtrop, co-curator of the photographic exhibition; David Moore

Right: the Felstead House, one of the five Griffin houses open for inspection for the Griffin Festival.



Below: the giant puppets of Walter and Marion in front of the Festival marquee and the Griffin Centre shops built c.1925.



WALTER

 MARION

GRIFFIN

 GRIFFIN



Above: the procession led by the giant puppets of Walter and Marion and the Willoughby Brass Band set off for the Haven Amphitheatre.

Left: Willoughby Brass Band gets ready to play at the Haven Amphitheatre before Professor James Weirick speaks on the interesting shareholders of GSDA.

