



## News Update 37

April 2003

**Griffin, Walks and Water Glimpses**  
Sunday 13 April, 11.00am to 3.30pm. Corner  
of Edinburgh Road and The Postern, Castlecrag.

*In the 1920s, attracted by the beauty of this Middle Harbour peninsula, Walter Burley Griffin designed an urban development to harmonise with the landscape. To celebrate this legacy, choose from a variety of undemanding walks in Castlecrag. Join guided tours of gardens, walkways and reserves looking at the architecture of Griffin, his partner Eric Nicholls, or the work of other prominent 20th century architects. Visit heritage stalls and an outdoor photographic exhibition including photos from the 1920s and many taken by Max Dupain in 1965.*

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) has as the theme for its Heritage Festival this year “freshwater – water, waves and wandering”. The festival spans two weekends and on its final day, Sunday 13 April, the Walter Burley Griffin Society will be hosting a special event as described above in the Trust’s Festival programme.

The assembly point will be at the intersection of The Postern and Edinburgh Road, a section of which will be closed to traffic. The National Trust, Historic Houses Trust, the Walter Burley Griffin Society and other heritage bodies will be setting up stalls to provide information on their activities and will sell books, videos and a wide variety of heritage-related items. Tickets for the guided walks will be sold here - short walk \$10 per person, long walk \$15, concessions and members discounts available. There will be two themes for the guided walks, both of which will depart regularly at short intervals. One walk will explore the fruits of

Griffin’s passion that architecture should be well integrated into the landscape. It will cover his street planning, walkways and reserves, as well as his local domestic architecture and that of his partner Eric Nicholls. Participants will be guided to see many of his Castlecrag houses and, in some cases, be able to walk in their gardens. (There will be no house inspections on this occasion).

The Griffins’ Castlecrag Estate remains an important listed Heritage Area and its features have inspired some of Australia’s most celebrated modern architects to build outstanding houses in the suburb. The second type of walk will explore the work of well-known and emerging post-war architects such as Muller, Seidler, Lucas, Cox, and Popov. It will also illustrate the importance to heritage conservation of effective planning.

The routes of both walks will pass by displays of more than twenty enlarged photographs of the suburb taken in its early years. Many of these are by Australia’s most celebrated landscape and architectural photographer, Max Dupain (who was a Castlecrag resident).

Willoughby City Council has introduced a community programme for residents of Castlecrag, Northbridge and Willoughby called “Streets to Creeks – Sailors Bay”. It is funded by the NSW Government’s Stormwater Trust and its aim is to prevent stormwater run off pollution of the local bushland and creeks which drain into Sailor’s Bay.

As part of that programme, and on the same day as the Society’s event, Willoughby Council will host two sessions of live musical performances, poetry readings and other “happenings” in the

Griffin's celebrated Haven Amphitheatre at The Barricade in Castlecrag. These will be scheduled to commence at around 1.00pm and 3.30 pm. At 4.30pm the amphitheatre will host an Easter pantomime titled "The Eggstroadinary Magic Muddle". Since local community groups will be making food and drinks available, the amphitheatre will be a natural end point for the Society's walks. There will be a free shuttle bus service back to the assembly point and heritage stalls on Edinburgh Rd.

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

### **Willoughby City Library receives grant for conservation of Griffin plans**

Willoughby Library has received funding in the 2002 Community Heritage Grants Program for conservation of some of the Walter Burley Griffin blueprints and coloured plans that the Library holds in its archives.

The Library holds over 70 sheets of blueprints and coloured plans that have been submitted to the Council for building applications in the 1920s and 1930s. The National Library holds microfiche copies of these. Most of the coloured plans and blueprints are signed by Walter Burley Griffin and/or by Eric Nicholls. The most significant of these have been pasted on boards for an exhibition in about the 1960s. The conservation treatment will remove the board, treat the paper and provide a mylar protective cover.

The Library was already in the process of having the backing removed and these works conserved. The Community Heritage Grant will nearly halve the time spent to conserve these local works. The Library is delighted to have the opportunity to complete this project in the shorter time.

**Carol Russell**

**Local Studies Librarian, Willoughby City Library**

### **President's update**

Having been given the honour of being elected as its third president at the Society's recent AGM, I would like to bring you all up to date on our activities and plans. Now in its fifteenth year, the Society is in good health but your committee is seeking ways to extend its activities and to make your membership more rewarding.

### **Annual General Meeting**

The centrepiece of our AGM was an illustrated talk by Sydney University's newly-appointed head

of architecture, Professor Tom Heneghan, titled In a strange land. We again would like to thank him for his fascinating insights into fitting modern architecture into the Japanese landscape and culture.

Adrienne Kabos, as president, outlined the highlights of the year, noting that the pursuit of our core objective of preserving the Griffin heritage has recently been demanding very much more of the committee's time and energy. We made detailed submissions on proposals for Melbourne University's Newman College, the Glebe incinerator and the Eric Pratten, Cheong and Creswick houses in Sydney. We were also involved with nine other proposals for developments adjoining Griffin houses or on sensitive sites within the Griffin Conservation Area. In most of these the Society has made a significant positive contribution.

Other achievements mentioned by Adrienne include:

- Winning a \$2,500 dollar for dollar grant from the Heritage Council of NSW to produce an educational brochure on Castlecrag's heritage.
- Assisting the National Archives in promoting their very successful exhibition A Vision Splendid; how the Griffins imagined Australia.
- Developing the Society's own website, for which we very much appreciate the voluntary efforts of Castlecrag expert, Bryan Richards.

As treasurer, I presented the Financial Statements which showed that the Society ran at a deficit of some \$3200 for the year ended June 2002. This resulted mainly from some abnormally high function and development costs, coupled with a lower level of revenue generating activities. Your committee notes that our net assets remain close to levels of the past six years, at around \$20,000. We would be pleased to send members more details of the President's or Treasurer's reports – please contact the Secretary, Kerry McKillop, on 02 9958 4516 for these.

After ten years of heroic effort and marvellous achievements, Adrienne Kabos decided to step down from the presidency. The meeting gave her a standing ovation for her dedication and skilful leadership. We also welcomed our new committee member, Vicki Craig, and thanked retiring committee member Howard Rubie for all his work since the Society's foundation. The new committee  
Andrew Kirk - President  
Professor James Weirick - Vice President  
Kerry McKillop - Secretary  
John Kabos - Treasurer  
Professor Carrick Chambers, Vicki Craig,  
Stephen Davies, Adrienne Kabos, Paul Melchert,

Martin O'Donoghue, Akky van Ogtrop,  
Anne Watson - committee members.

### Plans and priorities

You will see from the results of the members' survey (see below) that most respondents were very satisfied with their membership and the Society's effectiveness. I am very encouraged from reading your comments and ideas and talking to many of our members. While there is a lot still to do, we are generally putting our emphasis on the right issues and projects. We are aiming for and maintaining high standards in what we do and we have hard working, conscientious people on the committee.

However, I have some concerns. The workload on the committee has been heavy and by giving priority to conservation matters, we have been frustrated at not having the time to organise activities for members or the general public. We do apologise for that. Without question, we have many more opportunities than resources, especially given the number of good ideas in your survey responses. The committee met on February 18 to address this issue and resolved that we will immediately review and prioritise all of our activities and then develop realistic, achievable plans. I will report back to you on this. Certainly conservation will remain our core activity, but we hope to find ways to increase membership numbers and members' activities, especially outside Sydney, and to promote the Griffin story more widely amongst specialists and the general public.

I was delighted by the level and thoughtfulness of your responses to the survey. We obviously have a high quality membership which cares about our husbandry of the Griffin ideas and ideals. This is very pleasing and encouraging to my fellow committee members and me. We thank you again for your interest.

### Results of Members' Survey

Many thanks to those of you who responded to the survey which was posted out late last year. The committee thoroughly reviewed your opinions and suggestions and these have played an important part in helping us review our priorities and activities. While a clear majority of respondents were very satisfied with their membership and the Society's effectiveness, no doubt there are areas which we can improve. Here is a brief summary of the results (see footnote):

**Respondents:** Response rate high – about a third of individual members. Almost half of respondents live outside Sydney, about a quarter interstate. Middle-aged and older – very few under 40. Most tertiary educated – well over half architects and

academics.

**Membership:** Longstanding – almost half members for ten years or more. Most joined to support the Society's heritage and conservation aims and to "keep in touch" with research, books and emerging issues. Some, especially non-Sydney members, feel Society is too Castlecrag-oriented, needs more coherence and activity elsewhere.

**Newsletter:** Extremely well received – almost all "very satisfied". Preference for rigorous articles on Griffin history, buildings, heritage issues and current research. More important to keep standards up than to publish frequently (but conflict here with need for timely event notice – probable solution is email advice). Needs more interstate and overseas material.

**Activities and priorities:** Conservation is clearly top priority: highest support scores for representations to councils, bureaucrats and heritage bodies about threats and policies. Also very well-supported: conducting tours of buildings and Griffin-influenced locations (including outside Sydney). Next, but still supported by a clear majority: "spreading the word" through general and specialist publicity, meetings, events etc. Low support levels for producing educational materials for students due to apparent cost and doubtful impact, website preferred. Lowest support for seeking external discounts for members.

Footnote: Because the sample size was small and certainly not random, and because most questions requested open-ended verbal responses, the survey results have not been presented quantitatively. The major benefit to the committee has been through ideas and issues raised by members, for which, again, many thanks.

**Andrew Kirk.**

### New National Capital Authority Griffin project

Griffin designed Canberra as a small city of 25,000 which was to grow to around 75,000 people. Its population is already more than four times that level. In considering how it should develop over the next decades, the NCA has decided that fundamental to its planning is a clear understanding of the Griffin legacy because the national capital plan states as a key objective: "to respect the geometry and intent of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra". It acknowledges that Griffin's ideas remain relevant and valued but, paradoxically, what precisely constitutes his legacy has never been satisfactorily appraised.

As a result, in November last year the NCA

launched a project called "The Griffin Legacy". Its aim is to analyse comprehensively and explicitly define just what constitutes that legacy. The analysis will address Griffin's intentions as expressed and modified in successive plans for Canberra. To lead the work it has appointed Christopher Vernon as Design Advisor to the Authority. Christopher is an acknowledged Griffin scholar and landscape architect. Originally from Chicago, he is now based at the University of Western Australia.

Initially, Christopher plans to return to the original design to establish Griffin's planning intentions, both physical and philosophical, in order to establish a validated benchmark of what constitutes the Griffin plan. He will then report on what has been developed, what remains to be realised, what should be retained, what no longer has relevance, what can be changed and what elements should be considered inviolate.

The first step is to gather all known textual and graphic sources on Canberra produced by the Griffins. Christopher is seeking any original reports, plans and drawings that might help piece together the Griffins' thinking in the important early years of Australia's capital city. The NCA has already located many plans and other material but the search continues for more. If any member is able to assist, Christopher can be contacted via the NCA in Canberra on 6271 2888.

**Andrew Kirk**

### **Castlecrag Library's 50th birthday gift**

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Castlecrag Library, the Society has given the Library a book *The Griffins in Australia and India: The complete works and projects of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin* edited by Jeff Turnbull and Peter Y. Navaretti, for its collection.

This 440 page book describes and illustrates the Griffins' 250 projects of their Australian practice that spanned twenty years from 1914 to 1935, and the 95 Indian projects designed in the two years from 1935 until Walter's death in Lucknow in 1937.

On 3 November 1951, after 4 years of fund raising by the Castlecrag community, and a building grant from Willoughby Council, Castlecrag Library was officially opened by the Deputy Mayor, Charles Braithwaite. The library was designed by Eric Nicholls as an extension to the Castlecrag Community Centre also designed by him and opened in 1947. It was the first purpose-built library in Willoughby Municipality, and was completed 7 years before Artarmon and Naremburn Libraries were built, and 26 years before Willoughby City

Library at Chatswood.

Another great achievement of Castlecrag Library is the fact that it is the only library in Willoughby City still run totally by volunteers

**Adrienne Kabos**

### **Griffin Reserves Discovery Walks**

Willoughby Council conducted walks through the Castlecrag Reserve system on Sunday 22 September, as part of its Spring Festival activities. These interpretive walks aimed at increasing resident appreciation and understanding of the Griffin Estate and showcased the bushland regeneration work undertaken by committed residents.

The guided walks around Castlecrag have proven to be popular with the local community. This year two walks were conducted with both filling up quickly. Participants walked through the walkway and reserve system seeing how elements of the Griffin vision have survived, the problems that these areas have faced, and what the community and Council are doing to preserve Griffin's legacy.

Change is taking place throughout the public places of Castlecrag. You may notice that the bushland character of the suburb is slowly being revived. From road islands to neighbourhood reserves locally native plants are being propagated and regenerated. Weeds are being reduced and in many places the bush is springing back to life. Walkers saw wildflowers in Casement Reserve, once smothered with weed such as mother of millions, Grass Trees on road islands that were once turf, and beautiful remnant trees providing a dappled canopy above.

The rainforest atmosphere and the magnificent natural rock escarpments, all recently unveiled under layers of rubbish and weeds, proved Embasure Reserve to be a hidden highlight of the walk. Historical photos from Tower Reserve revealed the massive change in the area over the past sixty years, but a short walk across the road to the lookout on Castlecrag's Northern Escarpment revealed one of Sydney harbour's most beautiful unchanged bushland landscapes.

If residents would like more information on what Council is doing throughout the Castlecrag Reserve system contact Council's Landscape Architect, James Smallhorn on 9777 7710. If you would like to join one of Castlecrag's six BushCare Groups contact Council's BushCare officer, Mandy Wilson on 9777 7718.

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Contributions are welcomed