



News Update 42

April 2006

GUIDED TOURS – THE UNIQUE INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE OF WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN AND ERIC MILTON NICHOLLS: MUNICIPAL INCINERATORS AT WILLOUGHBY AND GLEBE Saturday 8 April 2006

Bookings essential (see enclosed brochure)

As part of this year's Heritage Festival celebrating industrial heritage, conservation architect Trevor Waters will lead tours of the two incinerators in Sydney designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Eric Milton Nicholls. A two hour tour of Willoughby Incinerator with its sculptural form and crystalline ornament will be held in the morning, and a separate tour of Glebe Incinerator in the afternoon. Glebe Incinerator on the foreshore of Blackwattle Bay has just recently been restored. Please book early to avoid disappointment, phone 9777 1000. \$15 for one tour, \$25 for both tours

COMMONWEALTH GRANT AWARDED FOR WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN SOCIETY WEBSITE

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. has received a \$20,000 \$ for \$ grant to produce a website on the lives and work of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. The Minister, Senator Ian Campbell announced the successful *Sharing Australia's Stories* grant recipients last July with the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc being one of just 22 recipients out of more than 950 applications. The media release from the Minister is at www.deh.gov.au/minister/env/2005/mr05jul05.html

Construction of the website is progressing very well and it will go live in late June. The Society is very grateful for the work of many members and committee members who have written more

than 40 webpages for the website. The grant has enabled the Society to employ two web technicians, an editor, purchase over 100 images and copyright permissions, and produce three quick-time movies.

NEWS FROM CANBERRA

The Canberra Chapter is seeking volunteers to join its Committee - no offer of assistance too large or too small. The Chapter is expecting to hold at least 2 events this year, one in the next couple of months - speaker to be advised, and later in the year, Dianne Firth, Landscape Architect will be doing a talk on Lake Burley Griffin and the Griffin Plan - how they differ!

As we approach the centenaries of Canberra in 2012 and 2013, we will be marking these key dates (and those leading up to them) with talks and events.

We are also keen to hear from members with ideas about what the Society might do in Canberra to mark the winning of the design prize by Walter Burley Griffin.

HERITAGE VICTORIA REGISTRATION OF RANELAGH ESTATE

It is a pleasure to report to the Walter Burley Griffin Society that the Ranelagh Estate in Mount Eliza (Mornington Peninsula Shire Council) was added to the Victorian Heritage Register on 12 May 2005 as Heritage Register Number 1605. The Victorian Heritage Register is established under the Heritage Act and includes items which are of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria. The main elements of the listing are the original street pattern and reserves from the 1924 design by Walter Burley Griffin.

The Ranelagh Estate is bounded generally by Earimil Creek, Port Phillip Bay, Canadian Bay Road (formerly Boundary Road) and Mount Eliza Way (formerly part of Old Mornington Road now bypassed by the Nepean Highway) and consists of 795 allotments and thirteen reserves, twelve of which still exist. After eighty years the Estate is remarkably intact.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council made the nomination in early 2004 with the support of the Ranelagh Residents' Association. The registration recognises the cultural heritage significance of the Ranelagh Estate as an early example of garden suburb planning which is historically and aesthetically significant for its innovative design by Walter Burley Griffin, in association with Marion Mahony Griffin and Saxil Tuxen, which resulted in an estate with: *'distinctive long curved roads, recreation reserves, internal reserves, communal facilities and spacious triangular traffic islands.'* It is described as: *'a fine example of a residential subdivision designed to harmonise with the topography and indigenous vegetation of the area. The environmental concerns and principles evident in the design were ahead of their time.'*

Significant vegetation is also on the register - in particular 'the evergreen tunnel' of Monterey Cypress alternated with Tuart trees in Wimbledon Avenue and other stands of Tuart and Cypresses especially in Rosserdale Crescent and Rannoch Avenue.

Over years, abutting landowners have cared for the reserves and vigorously opposed any development on them. Past and present associations of Ranelagh residents are recognised in the Heritage Victoria citation as being active against overdevelopment.

The Heritage Act citation sets out the basis of the Estate's cultural heritage significance in the following terms: *'the Ranelagh Estate is of historical significance for its association with Chicago-born architects Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937) and Marion Mahony Griffin (1871-1961), leading figures in twentieth century architectural history. Their works were infused with progressive environmental and philosophical ideals, evident in such town planning projects as Canberra, Leeton in New South Wales, Castlecrag in Sydney and the Ranelagh Estate. The estate also has associations with Saxil Tuxen (1885-1975), an important town planning figure in Melbourne during the Interwar period whose (own) subdivision designs reflected the influence of garden suburb planning.'*

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is commended for its support and the Heritage Planning Officer, Mr Peter Brown, is especially thanked for his expertise and devotion to the task of



Ranelagh Beach 2005, photograph courtesy Ranelagh Residents Association

collecting and presenting the evidence on Ranelagh to Heritage Victoria as also are the contributors to the submission listed above. We are grateful also for the timely advice of Christopher Vernon and Peter Navaretti on the nomination process.

In spite of this very welcome recognition by Heritage Victoria we know that further vigilance will be required and that there is still work involved in convincing the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to follow the examples of Banyule Council in Victoria for the development of Heritage Guidelines for the Griffin Mount Eagle and Glenard Estates in Heidelberg, and of Willoughby Council in Sydney for the Development Control Plan No.19 for the Griffin Estate at Castlecrag.

Meg Breidahl, Ranelagh Residents' Association

VALE GLYNN NICHOLLS (1933 - 2006)

Architect Glynn Nicholls grew up in 'the idyllic bushland setting at Castlecrag' in an anthroposophical household. His father Eric Milton Nicholls became general secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in 1948, and in association with Sylvia Brose established the first Rudolph Steiner School in Australia. Many Anthroposophical meetings were held in Glynn's family home at 12 The Parapet.

Glynn studied architecture like his father, and after graduating joined his father who had 20 years previously been in partnership with Walter Burley Griffin. Glynn became a partner of his father's practice in 1958 and the firm became Nicholls Elliot and Nicholls. He married June in 1965 and had four children. After private practice, Glynn was hired by State Rail to manage the construction of Edgecliff station. Glynn died at the age of 72 after a long battle with Parkinsons disease.

THE CLAMP/GRIFFIN BUS TOUR

On 16 July a group of WBGs members set out on a fascinating excursion to explore the artefacts of Walter Burley Griffin's short lived partnership with J Burcham Clamp in 1914-15 under the expert guidance of James Weirick and Hector Abrahams. We set out from Castlecrag to explore architectural achievements from the partnership period, as well as buildings designed by Clamp prior to 1914 and in his later years.

Clamp was primarily a church architect and much of our agenda for the day was of an ecclesiastical nature. First stop was the Mosman Methodist Church, a product of the partnership period. Clamp was the dominant influence in the design, but our guides pointed out several Griffin features. We took a side excursion to experience the Harbour foreshores that enchanted Walter and Marion Griffin when they first arrived in 1914.

Next it was off to the Shore School Chapel at North Sydney, one of Clamp's finest buildings. It was designed following Clamp's visit to North America, where he first met Griffin, and demonstrates innovative design features from this experience. Geoff Sherington, the official historian of Shore School, kindly joined us for this inspection and provided a background briefing. Fay, our Willoughby Council driver, then dropped the group off at the State Library in Macquarie Street, where we were briefed on the innovative features of Clamp's classic 1907 Wyoming Chambers, one of the city's pioneer high-rise buildings.

Our stop at the 160-year old Christ Church St Lawrence near Central Railway Station was a highlight of the day. As the heritage architect overseeing the recent renovations of this historic building, Hector Abrahams was able to arrange a very personal tour of the church and the adjacent Rectory. Clamp was engaged for church restoration work following the 1905 fire and he added the brick rectory and hall on either side. The group enjoyed one of Sydney's finest Edwardian interiors in their tour of the rectory.

Moving on to Robertson Road, Centennial Park we observed the two houses there designed during the Clamp/Griffin partnership. They exhibit several distinctive Griffin features. Following lunch in Centennial Park, we proceeded to Waverley Cemetery where our objective was the James Stuart tomb. That this was the finest building of the Clamp/Griffin partnership suggests that this period was not the most notable of Griffin's remarkable career. Nearby was the grave of Leslie Augustus Burton Wade, the first Water Conservation & Irrigation Commissioner in New South Wales, whose partnership with Griffin for the urban designs of Leeton and Griffith in the Murrumbidgee

Irrigation Area was a more rewarding one than the brief but sterile association with Clamp.

Our final stop was Trinity Anglican Church at Dulwich Hill. Designed by Clamp after the break-up of the partnership, this building suggested that he had failed to take the opportunity to learn from his association with one of the world's great architects.

The tour group returned to Castlecrag much enlightened about a brief and evidently unsatisfactory element of Griffin's career. We expressed our deep appreciation to our two wonderful guides who had made the day such a satisfying experience.

Bob McKillop

THE ARCHITECTURE OF NEWMAN COLLEGE: WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN'S DOME, 1915-8

Dr Jeff Turnbull lecture presentation, Annual General Meeting, Walter Burley Griffin Society, October 2005

INTRODUCTION

The reinforced concrete ribbed dome over the dining and meeting hall was only one of the major architectural elements analysed in Jeff Turnbull's PhD thesis, *The Architecture of Newman College*, University of Melbourne, October 2004. In this thesis the planning construction and form for all of the functional elements in this one specific building were investigated.

Very little has been written about the design of Newman College. The longest text found on it was 12 pages in Marion Mahony Griffin's unpublished four-volume manuscript "The Magic of America" (Chicago, 1940-9). Griffin himself published a two-page article in *The Advocate*, the local Roman Catholic newspaper, Christmas Day 1915, which described the proposed college design and its functional aims. In addition, an important text for Griffin's theoretical ideas and attitudes is to be found in both the *Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal and Building* (Sydney) that recorded Walter's address to Melbourne architects during his first visit to Australia, August -November 1913.

Reading the building was required. Dr Turnbull's lecture demonstrated that Griffin adapted patterns from a diverse range of sources for the design of Newman College. For examples the patterns that Griffin layered to create the functional distribution, construction and form of the college's Rotunda and its dome were illustrated through 34 pairs of slides. This exposure and consequent discussion of the dome's particularities allowed some insights into Griffin's architectural ideas and compositional method overall.

THE COLLEGE DESIGN

Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937) was the conceptual designer of the Roman Catholic Newman College, University of Melbourne, while his architectural partner, Marion Mahony Griffin (1871-1961), was its facilitator. Their L-shape cloistered block with a central rotunda and ribbed dome is substantially a reinforced concrete construction with a stonework finish. The tendering process during March 1916 asked for prices for artificial stone (reinforced concrete), brickwork, or stonework. Subsequently Marion submitted the tender prices from Sydney, on her own letterhead, to the Chairman of the Executive Building Committee, Coadjutor Archbishop Daniel Mannix. (Marion ran her own practice from mid-1915 to mid-1917). It was this committee that chose to have a building consisting of a stone veneer constructed over a concrete fabric.

Marion stated in "Magic" that Walter was the designer of Newman College and its remarkable ribbed reinforced concrete dome. Walter, she wrote, had got off the train and presented to her a diagram, "as usual" drawn upon a small envelope. She exclaimed that the complete design was there in that diagram, and in his head. They clearly collaborated in bringing this diagram into reality. Inevitably she contributed much to the development of the design. Their "designer" and "executor" arrangement was very similar to that of the American architect Henry Hobson Richardson, as described in an 1888 biography written by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.

Griffin commuted at this time between Sydney, where they both lived, and Melbourne, where

he had a government office as Director of Federal Capital Works. However, he did take rooms in Elsternwick, a suburb at the terminus of Melbourne's southern tramline. The design sketch plans, July-November 1915, and the contract document drawings, December 1915-April 1916, were drawn in the Griffin's Sydney office, where Roy and Genevieve Lippincott (Griffin's sister) assisted Marion. Griffin designed and drew the reinforced concrete fabric in their Melbourne private practice office with the assistance of George Elgh. Evidently Marion and the Lippincotts moved to Melbourne at the beginning of the college construction phase, April 1916. Marion, then Walter, returned to Sydney during 1924 and 1925 to live at Castlecrag.

The rotunda and dome enclose the Newman College Dining Hall that could seat 200 for meals and 500 for meetings. The external dome finish was at first cement render, later sheathed with copper sheet by Fritsch & Fritsch architects during 1935. The smooth dome seems to grow out of the rough textured stone rotunda base. The whole is embellished on top with a square lantern, a perforated fleche, and 12 tree-like pinnacles. In early photographs strange thin and pointed timber masts are seen on the parapets, terminating the diagonal lines of the four sets of three pinnacles on the roof. Griffin had loaded the architecture with symbolic imagery. That Christ the Master is at the centre of his 12 apostles is an immediate reading of the dome and its iconography.

To be continued in the next News Update

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____
Address: _____
_____ Postcode: _____
Phone: _____
Date: _____
Amount enclosed: _____

Please make cheques payable to:
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The Treasurer c/- 140 Edinburgh Rd, Castlecrag,
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MEMBERSHIP

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. was established in 1988 and aims to create a greater awareness and appreciation of the Griffins' design, architecture and planning, and thereby encourage the conservation of their internationally significant work. The Society produces a newsletter and organises guest speakers. If you would like to join the Society in Australia fill out the form below.

Individual	\$ 25pa
Student	\$ 5pa
Individual overseas	\$ 35pa
Community organisations	\$ 25pa
Business organisations	\$ 50pa