

News Update

March 2001

Marion Mahony Griffin, A Beginning, and End and A Beginning - Sunday 11 March 8.00pm Haven Amphitheatre, Castlecrag

Enjoy the beautiful setting of the Haven Amphitheatre at night, and an interesting slide-illustrated presentation by American visitor John Notz who will first overview the Hubbard Woods of Marion's childhood, then (a village) and now (effectively a suburb of Chicago). Notz will next explain the circumstances which led to the recent creation of a memorial to her in Chicago's Graceland Cemetery.



Marion Mahony Griffin pictured in the *Daily Telegraph* 30 April 1936 departing for India

From 7.30pm a free shuttle bus can be caught from Castlecrag shops in Edinburgh Rd (there is no parking at the Haven Amphitheatre)

If the weather is wet the talk will be held at the Castlecrag Community Centre hall that is located at the western

end of The Rampart, Castlecrag at the end of a battleaxe driveway. For further information contact Kerry McKillop 9958 4516 or Adrienne Kabos 9958 2060.

City of Dreams outdoor screening, Saturday 3 March 7.30pm

To be held in the grounds of Glenaeon School

Castlecrag campus, corner Edinburgh Road and Edith Street. Arrive from 6pm and bring a picnic. The film will be introduced by Marie Nicholls, daughter of Eric Nicholls. Following the film the Director and Producer of the film will answer questions. In the event of rain it will happen on March 10. If weather doubtful call 9958 7975.

Griffin walking tour - Saturday 28 April 2.00 to 4.00pm in Heritage Week

Organised by the Walter Burley Griffin Society and Willoughby City Council to celebrate the Centenary of Federation. The walk will be led by Professor James Weirick and will take you through many of the Castlecrag reserves and walkways, and past many of the Griffin houses including those built for key political figures at the turn of the century.

Numbers are strictly limited to 40. Cost \$5. Bookings essential. Telephone 02 9958 2060.

City of Dreams - 23 April 2001, 6pm screening of film plus commentary by James Weirick and Anna Rubbo

This new 52 minute documentary titled *City of Dreams* exploring the collaboration and philosophies of Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin will be screened in the lecture theatre of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' headquarters at 'Tusculum'. It will be followed by critical analysis and commentary by James Weirick and Anna Rubbo, Griffin scholars and academics. Please book. Ph (02) 9356 2955

A National Trust of Australia (NSW) 2001 Heritage Festival event.

Tusculum, 3 Manning Street, Potts Point

Tickets: \$11 RAI/NT Members, \$15 non-members

Other dates for your diary:

- **Wednesday 9 May** WBG Memorial Lecture in Canberra organised by RAIA of ACT
- **May** (date yet to be fixed) ABC TV screening of *City of Dreams*
- **9 - 12 May** *Future Canberra* conference and celebrations (see enclosed brochure)
- **June** National Trust house inspections of Moon and Fishwick houses for National Trust members only
- **September** opening of Griffin Federation Track
- **28 - 31 October** *Capital Dreaming* congress in Canberra (see enclosed brochure)

The Federal Capital and the Centenary of Federation

To commemorate the Centenary of Federation, this issue of *News Update* includes an edited extract from the *Building* journal of June 12, 1914 as a supplement, and also below reviews a book of particular relevance that places the Federal Capital competition in context.

Canberra 1912: Plans and Planners of the Australian Capital Competition - a review

This book by John W. Reps documents the Canberra competition and all the entries known to exist, and describes the controversies that characterised many aspects of the Federal Capital competition.

In the time of the Canberra competition, prior to the creation of town planning as a profession, debate raged between architects, engineers and surveyors in their "struggle for supremacy" as to which profession should be pre-eminent in the role of city planning. As early as 1890 John Sulman stated that "The architect is the one man who by training and experience combines in himself a knowledge of all the conditions of town-planning ..." outraging

engineers and surveyors.. Thus it was into this atmosphere of tension that the international competition for Australia's capital city was thrust.

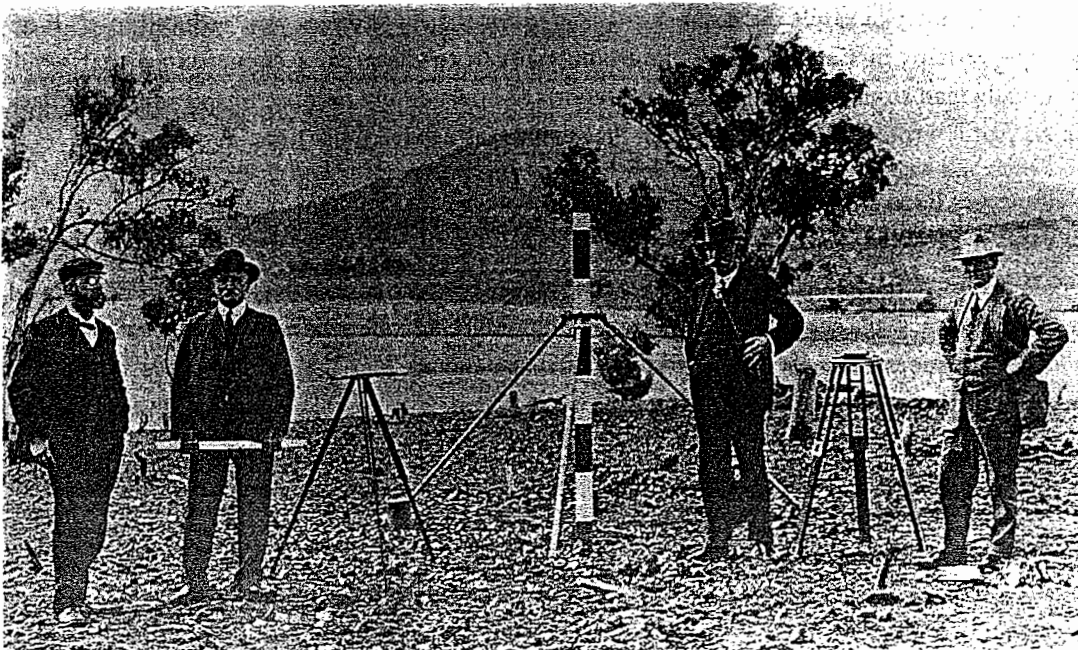
There were 137 entries for the competition of which eleven were rejected for violating the competition conditions. The judges eliminated eighty others as not worth further consideration, and by using large purpose-made photographs 27 inches square, the remaining forty-six (all described and illustrated in the book) were considered on the site of the future city. From these, eight finalists were chosen by the three judges (an architect, an engineer and an engineer/surveyor).

On 23 May 1912, the Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley announced the winner as being Entry No.29 that of Mr Walter Burley Griffin, architect and landscape artist, Steinway Hall, Chicago, Illinois.

Of Griffin's plan, the book points out that 'Each radial avenue forms the spine of a grid of straight minor streets intersecting at right angles. Where each grid system met another, Griffin skilfully modified the street alignments to avoid dangerous acute-angle intersections and awkward-shaped lots. He noted that his plan contained "no acute angle sites ... for triangular buildings are as expensive as they are irredeemably ugly".'

The book was published by Melbourne University Press in 1997. \$65.95 incl. GST, 494pp. Available from Museum of Sydney Shop, Bridge Street, Sydney.

Controversy also surrounded the implementation of the Griffins' winning plan as can be understood from the *Building* article reproduced in the supplement. At the time, in 1914 when this article was published, New Zealand and New South Wales had established town planning associations but the Town Planning Association of NSW was the only association in Australia.



LEFT: The three competition judges at left of photo at Canberra in late March 1912. Taken from *Canberra 1912* by John W. Reps published by Melbourne University Press. Picture Section, National Library of Australia.

Poor fellow our country...or a dash of hope?

The Society was greatly honoured to have as its guest speaker, at its twelfth AGM last November, Joan Domicelj renowned heritage advisor and advocate, and winner of the RAI's Marion Mahony Griffin Award last year.

Joan is an architect by training and currently a member of the NSW Heritage Council. She prepared Australia's nominations for World Heritage listing for the Sydney Opera House and the Greater Blue Mountains. Below is a precis of her talk titled *Poor fellow our country...or a dash of hope?*

Joan began by finding common ground with the Griffins and their philosophy of integrating architecture with the local natural environment, speaking of her admiration for the Griffin-designed 'houses breathing quietly in the bush'.

Joan considered current building practice in Australia, instancing the imposition of larger and larger structures on residential sites - a practice that would probably concern and alarm the Griffins. She believes it vital for designers to understand each site in depth - its natural characteristics and its history - in order to be able to create a building which responds to the specifics of that place.

An outstanding example of an architect with the gift of sensibility is Joern Utzon (as expressed in the design for the Sydney Opera House). He is Joan's first named hero, because of his extraordinary attention to place and detail, capturing the essence of harbour and city, before resolving, with precision, what was to be done - with "the fifth facade".

The second hero is Lloyd Rees, who continuously celebrated in inspired paint, the human relationship with nature - he recognised the brilliance of Utzon's creation at its land and water junction. Joan stated that "as change is inevitable, it is society's responsibility to understand place and people and to foster their healthy evolution."

UNESCO's World Heritage Convention was instituted in 1972. Signatory countries may nominate natural or cultural sites for inscription on the World Heritage List, as being of 'outstanding universal value'. From a 'Griffin' point of view, it is interesting that the World Heritage Committee has created a strategy to create a more representative List. This is because of mounting criticisms that monumental architecture has dominated and more vernacular structures have been neglected, and of a perceived over-emphasis on the 'civilised' cultures of Europe (and perhaps the Middle East), leaving natural assets to 'peripheral' countries of the world, such as ourselves. There is growing recognition that the criteria for heritage protection need to find a balance between culture and nature - based on themes of 'human relationships with the land' (the Griffin approach), and diverse cultures - 'people in society'.

Australia is the oldest, driest, most soil-depleted of inhabited continents, with an extraordinarily ancient history of human adaptation to this difficult environment. We have 13 sites on the World Heritage Register, with the nomination of the Blue Mountains pending (since listed). In the past, Australian delegates have played a significant role in bringing indigenous traditions to the World Heritage debate. Joan pointed out the lack of importance often given to Aboriginal history and cultural expression. However, she expressed a 'dash of hope' at the growing extraordinary recognition of issues surrounding reconciliation. We have 20,000 items on the NSW State Government Heritage list, but there is strong emphasis on items of European heritage built in the last 200 years.

The third of Joan's heroes is Dr 'Nuggett' Coombs, for his ongoing commitment to Aboriginal welfare and his recognition of Aboriginal cultures' 'right to be different', and his instrumental role in the 10 point plan of Wik.

Joan believes that Australia formerly had an enviable international reputation as an 'honest broker', as a small Western power, with a highly professional and unpolitical outlook. However, Australia's image on the international scene has diminished considerably over the past decade, and we are no longer seen as 'good global citizens' as far as heritage and conservation goals are concerned.

Australia has in recent years become highly political, placing emphasis on trade matters and economic development in heritage areas, and controversies about whether they are worthy of World Heritage status.

The Australian Heritage Commission [the national heritage body] which was created in the 1970s is currently undergoing major change. By 2002 it will no longer be independent but instead be within a government department. The Heritage Act has been amended to include community-based heritage assessment, and we are facing up to issues such as the conservation of old-growth forests. In summary, our 'poor country' faces overdevelopment and ignorance of the cultural and environmental values of many sites, but there is the 'dash of hope' that comes with a growing 'sense of place'.

WBGS committee

At the twelfth Annual General Meeting of the Society held on Sunday 5 November 2000 at the Haven Amphitheatre, Castlecrag, Sydney, the following committee members were elected:

President: Adrienne Kabos

Vice President: Professor James Weirick

Treasurer: Andrew Kirk

Secretary: Kerry McKillop

Committee:

Emeritus Professor Carrick Chambers,
John Kabos, John McInerney,

Associate Professor Anna Rubbo, Howard Rubie, Akky Van Ogtrop, Anne Watson.

Sincere thanks go to Maggie Chambers who after five years on the committee is retiring. We particularly thank her for her major contribution as Treasurer for the past four years.

We thank Andrew Kirk for stepping into the role of Treasurer.

News from America

The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America newsletter of Fall 2000 reports that the American Society had its First Annual Meeting last June. It was held in the Griffin designed Emery House in Elmhurst, Illinois with guest speaker Chicago architect John Eifler who discussed the restoration process of the Emery House. In the afternoon, architectural historians Paul Kruty and Paul Sprague led all participants on a tour of Griffin's William B. Sloane House and Wright's Frank B. Henderson House which are within easy walking distance of the Emery House.

Rock Crest-Rock Glen was featured in the *New York Times* of Sunday 2 July 2000. This National Historic District has eight houses, five of which are designed by Walter Burley Griffin. It will feature again on American TV early this year.

Chicago's Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks last July named the two houses designed by W.B.Griffin for John Gauler in 1908 on Chicago's north side as Chicago Landmarks.

Walter Burley Griffin in America by Mati Maldre and Paul Kruty is now available in paperback.

Griffin items recently in the media

The Australian, February 16, 2001, an article titled 'Capital punishment, broken dreams' about the Griffins and *City of Dreams* film.

ABC TV news item, 9 February 2001, on the harvesting of cork, by experts from Spain, from the cork tree plantation planted by W.B.Griffin in Canberra.



ABOVE: The Griffin cork plantation in Canberra photographed during the Walter Burley Griffin Society's Canberra tour led by Professor James Weirick in 1998.

North Shore Times, January 26, 2001, brief profiles of 'The creators of our community' including the Griffins and Eric Nicholls.

Belle magazine, Dec/Jan 00-01, article on the Stella James House, Avalon, Sydney, titled 'Capital Gains'.

Chicago Reader, December 15, 2000, a seven page article on W.B.Griffin's American and Australian work titled 'Rebuilding an Architect'.

Symmetry, Spring 2000 Subaru magazine article on Castlecrag titled 'Building Society'.

reel2reel published by Film Australia, December 2000: report on film *City of Dreams* officially launched by the Minister for Communications Senator Richard Alston in Canberra last November. *City of Dreams* will premier on ABC TV this May.

News Update editors Adrienne Kabos (9958 2060) and Kerry McKillop (02 9958 4516). Contributions are welcomed.

MEMBERSHIP FORM



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Please make cheque payable to
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post it to
The Treasurer at 140 Edinburgh Rd, Castlecrag, NSW 2068.

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

Individual	\$ 15pa
Student	\$ 5pa
Individual overseas	\$ 25pa
Community organisations	\$ 25pa
Business organisations	\$ 50pa

tailors since the building's completion in 1924. These were recently sold to a developer, Lechte Corporation, which received permission from Heritage Victoria early this year to strata the building for the purpose of creating apartments.

All work is to be within the guidelines of Heritage Victoria including that the facade is to remain intact, all original internal fittings and joinery are to be kept and restored, and purchasers of apartments will have written into their contracts that they are not allowed to complain about the theatre noise. This is a very important aspect for the theatre and its long term viability.

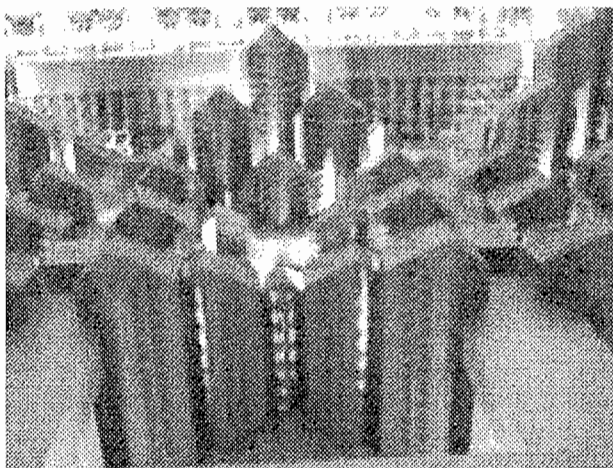
Noise transmission from apartments to the theatre is a major concern, and still unresolved. The present plans for converting the office spaces to apartments have plumbing and waste pipes running just above the theatre's ceiling and will have a detrimental effect on the theatre unless a solution is found.

Demolition is 98% complete and construction is due to commence shortly. The developer is planning to convert the office spaces into sixty 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, and is selling them off the plan with about 45 having been pre-sold already.

Sound research and the Capitol Theatre

Acoustic investigations are also going on to test the Capitol Theatre's suitability as a sound research centre. As reported in *The Australian* on April 3, an American sound technologist, Tom Holman has recently visited Australia to study the acoustics of Melbourne's Capitol Theatre. Holman described the acoustics of the theatre as well ahead of their time and unlike anything else he'd seen.

Professor Ian Smart is conducting a feasibility study for the theatre to provide opportunities for the IT industry to improve the audio quality of the internet.



ABOVE: Detail from the Capitol Theatre, Melbourne photographed by Justin Coogan of MGS.

In the article Holman is quoted as saying "We will not change the walls and ceiling, but we may change the floors and install a system of speakers

and electronic equipment." RMIT University's approval would be needed for any reconfiguration.

National Trust renames 'Burley Griffin Lodge' the 'Stella James House'

The Board of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) has recently renamed the Griffin designed house built for Stella James in 1933 as a weekend at Avalon, Sydney. The house was donated to the National Trust in 1964 who in that year resolved to name it 'Burley Griffin Lodge'.

The National Trust has now renamed the house after the client who commissioned it, as is the custom for most architect-designed houses of the 20th century. As the Trust points out Walter Burley Griffin was never referred to as 'Burley Griffin'. In his lifetime he was Griffin, Walter Griffin or Walter B. Griffin. This Society applauds the National Trust for this decision.

Restoration work at Stella James House

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) has been successful in obtaining Commonwealth funding for conservation works under the Federation Cultural Heritage Projects Program under the Federation Fund at a number of its properties.

One of those properties is the Stella James House (formerly known as Griffin Lodge) at Avalon. Scott Robertson, the architect for the 1993 work has again been engaged for the current work and the same builder, R.E. Charles Constructions, has again been successful for the current project.

In 1993 major stabilisation works were carried out by underpinning the perimeter stone walls to rock, the roof was rewaterproofed with a new membrane and new flashings were let into the parapets in an attempt to stop the leaks. At that time a minimalist approach was taken in that the new roof flashings merely replaced the old, failed flashings.

Despite the "soitly-soitly" approach adopted in 1993 the house has continued to leak and the current works are attempting to address the leaking roof by taking a more interventionist approach; parapet stones are being removed and through flashings of lead are being installed. One of the parapets had been flashed prior to the recent heavy, prolonged rain and no leaks occurred, indicating that such an approach may be successful. However, during the prolonged rain water penetration occurred through some of the joints in the solid stone walls and a certain degree of water penetration in the future is to be expected.

The sandstone retaining wall supporting the terrace to the north of the house had continued to bulge since 1993 and so it has been carefully disassembled, the stones numbered and re-erected on a new reinforced concrete footing and mass brickwork wall behind. The terrace will be grassed as it was during Stella and Clare's tenure. The remainder of the house was checked by structural

engineer Simon Wiltshier and it appears that no further movement has occurred since the 1993 underpinning was carried out. Even the fireplace wall supporting the garage, which was not underpinned in 1993, appears not to have moved measurably since 1993.

The kitchen cupboards are being repaired, particleboard sheets removed, unsightly repairs removed and the modern stainless steel sink is being removed; to be replaced with a replica of the original Griffin-designed "German Silver" sink. The design of the replica sink is derived from a photograph of the original sink taken prior to its removal some three decades ago and the dimensions are based on those of the almost identical sink at Griffin's Winter House. When the Winter House sink dimensions were transferred to the space in the cupboards at the Stella James House they coincided almost exactly. When the sink and base cupboards were removed the original galvanised water pipes were visible in their wall chases which provided the physical evidence that the kitchen mixer could have been similar to the unique mixer still in use in the Winter House. This was an important discovery because the photographs of the Stella James kitchen from

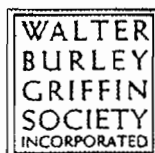
immediately prior to the original sink's removal had shown a rather makeshift, primitive arrangement of water pipes and taps fixed on the face of the wall.

The kitchen floor had deteriorated and was spongy so it has been taken up and the damp and termite-affected timber battens replaced with sound battens. The original Rimu floor boards are being re-used but the original boards had not been taken under the kitchen cupboards and so additional new Rimu boards are to be used there and to replace the boards which had rotted.

The interior colours have been investigated by conservator Julie Whittlam and the results of those investigations are currently being analysed to determine the original interior wall finishes and colours (if any).
Scott Robertson

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