

## News Update 40

March 2005

### **GRIFFIN LEGACY: A PUBLIC FORUM**

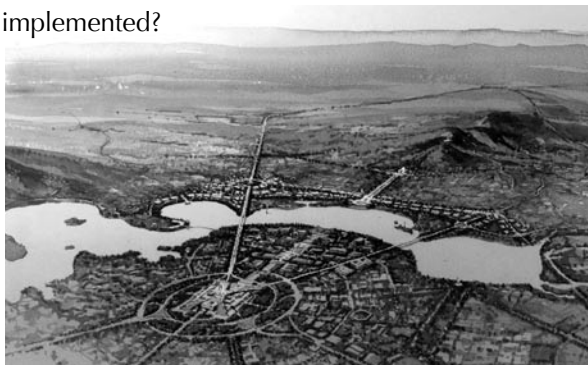
**Wednesday 2 March 5.30 - 7.00pm**

**The Studio Theatre**

**National Museum of Australia**

The Walter Burley Griffin Society (Canberra Chapter) is hosting a public forum to promote discussion of *The Griffin Legacy*, the plan recently released by the National Capital Authority.

Does the plan reflect the essence of the Griffin Scheme? Is it relevant to the 21st Century? What will Canberra look and feel like if it is implemented?



These issues will be addressed by a panel of speakers including Stuart McKenzie (for Annabelle Pegrum CEO of National Capital Authority), Steve Byron (Developer & Property Council), Di Firth (Landscape Architecture, Canberra University), Tony Powell (former head of National Capital Development Authority) and Neil Savery (Head of Planning ACT).

Seats are limited. RSVP: Planning Institute of Australia, tel 02 6262 5933, email: [reception@planning.org.au](mailto:reception@planning.org.au)

### **THEOSOPHY, ANTHROPOSOPHY AND THE GRIFFINS: THE CONTINUING DEBATE**

**Tuesday 12 April, 5:30pm for 6:00pm**

**Metcalf Auditorium, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney**

The State Library of NSW in association with the Walter Burley Griffin Society will hold a free screening of the ABC *Compass* program 'Beyond Architecture' which will be followed by further discussion of this fascinating and controversial topic by a panel of experts including Professor James Weirick, Emeritus Professor Jill Roe, Dr Peter Proudfoot, Dr Graham Pont and Marie Nicholls.

Cost: \$11 for members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society, \$16.50 for non members.

Refreshments will be served.

Bookings essential, telephone: 9273 1770

### **GRIFFIN/CLAMP BUS TOUR, SYDNEY**

**Saturday 16 July 2005 10.00am start**

In their first year in Australia, 1914-1915, Walter and Marion Griffin formed a partnership with J. Burcham Clamp, a prominent Sydney architect of the Federation era.

Professor James Weirick will lead this one-day coach tour to inspect surviving projects of the Griffin/Clamp partnership: the Stuart Tomb at Waverley Cemetery; houses in Robertson Road, Centennial Park; and Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Dulwich Hill, together with earlier works designed by Clamp alone: The Rectory, Christ Church St Laurence; 'Wyoming Chambers'

Macquarie Street; Mosman Methodist Church and Shore Chapel, North Sydney. Heritage Consultants Hector Abrahams and Helen Wilson, and WBSGS Committee member Professor Geoff Sherington, author of the definitive history of Shore school, will provide additional historical insights and critical commentary on these projects.

Hector Abrahams is a partner at Clive Lucas Stapleton, where he has practised since 1987. His fields of particular interest include church architecture and collegiate architecture. He sits on church advisory panels for the Heritage Council of New South Wales and the Anglican church. He has worked on the conservation of Christ Church St Laurence, the place of Clamp's earliest and most elaborate commissions, as well as his own schooling; Wyoming Chambers, his tallest building; and has given advice on four later Clamp churches and several rectories.

Helen Wilson is a heritage consultant and architect who has concentrated on conservation and heritage-related projects for the last 15 years, including working on nominations for Clamp-designed churches for state heritage listing, and has gained a wide understanding of Clamp's designs and design development.

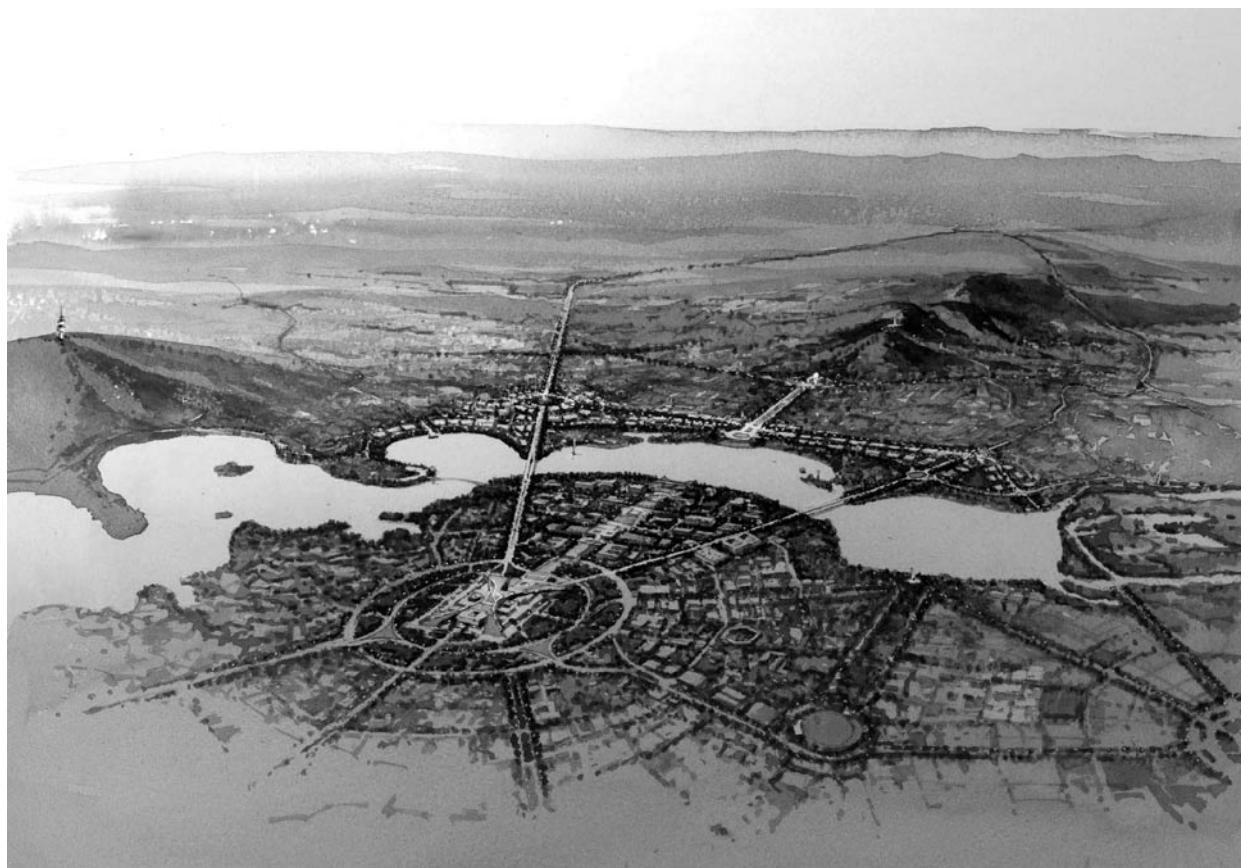
More information and booking details in the next newsletter.

### **THE INCINERATOR: WILLOUGHBY'S HERITAGE GEM**

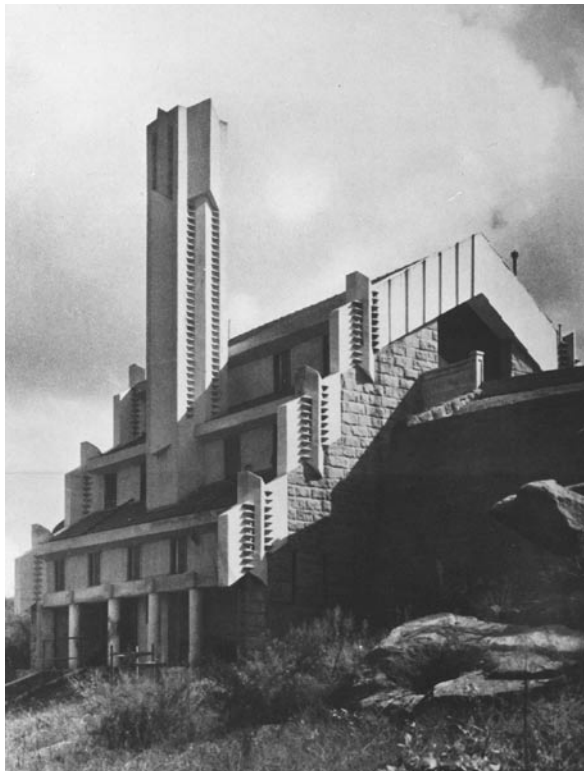
Willoughby Incinerator was designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Eric Nicholls in 1933 on behalf of the Reverberatory Incinerator & Engineering Company. It was a combined plant for incineration and transferring 'nightsoil' collected from unsewered properties to the metropolitan sewage system. The incinerator operated from 1934 to 1967, while the sewage transfer function continued until 1974, making the Willoughby Incinerator the longest serving of the Griffin and Nicholls incinerators as an industrial building.

Although the incinerator was well known for its architectural values, having been listed in the National Trust Register in 1966, its operations were the source of constant and legitimate complaints from local residents about its environmental impacts. In short, it was unloved by locals and the building soon fell into neglect and decay. By the late 1970s it was threatened with recommendations for demolition.

Conservation of the incinerator was championed



'Perspective of the Central National Area in the 21st century' published in *The Griffin Legacy: Canberra the Nation's Capital in the 21st Century*, National Capital Authority, 2004. Image by Haycraft Duloy. Detail of same image on page 1



Willoughby Incinerator, photographed shortly after completion, c.1935. Architects: W.B. Griffin and E.M. Nicholls. Courtesy Max Dupain.



Willoughby Incinerator photographed in 2005 showing the truncated chimney stack. The top decorative element was removed in 1954.

by heritage activists in the 1960s and 1970s, and the building was ultimately saved by the action of two brothers who came forward with a scheme to restore it for use as a restaurant. Willoughby Council support for the restoration was given in the form of a 50-year lease, which expires on 17 April 2029. The extensive renovation, which was partly funded by a \$100,000 loan from the New South Wales Heritage Council, eventually cost the developers close to half a million dollars. The interior was remodelled with 1930's furnishing and an exhibition of Griffin's work.

The restaurant, aptly named The Incinerator, opened on 6 September 1980. After a promising start, business fell away and the restaurant closed after only a few years. The lease was on sold and the new tenants converted the building into commercial offices. The incinerator was severely damaged by fire in late 1996. Following a further resale of the lease, the fire damage was restored and the building was again sub-let as a commercial office. In 2001, Willoughby City Council received a report from heritage consultants on the history, significance and management of the incinerator site. This put forward recommendations for a Plan of Management for the site, but the report was not presented to Council.

The location of the building and emerging structural problems affected the commercial

viability of the sub-lease and the building has been vacant for the past two years. In this period, the mortgagee took possession of the lease. The mortgagee has subsequently approached Council for assistance for the further renovation of the building. It is understood that this request includes a 15-year extension of the lease and a substantial financial contribution to the restoration works that are now required. Council requested a full structural report on the building. Council's consultants advised that major structural work is required to the chimney at an estimated cost of \$380,000, but the rest of the building is in a sound condition. The officers' recommendation to Council is that a 15-year extension be granted to the current lease to allow the lessee an adequate rent-free period to recoup their costs.

An informal meeting of interested parties at the incinerator on 7 January 2005 discussed Council's response and other options for its ongoing conservation and management. There was general consensus that the incinerator is Willoughby City's most important heritage asset and its conservation is therefore a high priority, while at the same time Council has a responsibility to ensure that funds are spent wisely. While several ideas were put forward regarding the possible use of the asset, there was a general desire to see some form of community/public use in at least part of the

building, which would require changes to the current lease arrangement. It was recognised that making the whole building suitable for public use under today's regulations (ie accessibility) would be very expensive and would probably compromise the heritage features of the structure. The best that could be achieved would probably be public use (eg, a community facility such as a gallery) of the top floor and private commercial use of the two lower floors.

In order for Council to adequately address the policy issues relating to the conservation and future use of the incinerator building, the meeting identified a number of legal and technical areas where further information is required. Following the meeting, members of the WBSG executive drafted a list of questions for Councillors on these matters. In addition to queries about the conditions of the existing lease arrangements, this covers the need for good professional technical advice regarding the conservation issues arising from the current situation, particularly in the light of the recommendations of the 2001 Conservation Study. The Society considers that specific expertise is required in terms of 20th Century heritage fabric, particularly in concrete and sandstone.

The Society has advised Councillors that its preferred option is for the whole of the Incinerator to become a community facility for public use. The second preference is for a part-community facility subsidised by a compatible commercial use, such as an office with the top floor as a gallery/meeting room with moveable partitions.

## **THE WORLD, THE SUBURB, THE 'CRAG**

### **Dr Robert Freestone**

**Editors' note:** Dr Robert Freestone is Associate Professor of Planning and Urban Development at the University of New South Wales, author of *Model Communities*, the definitive history of the Garden City movement in Australia, and President of the International Planning History Society. He was guest speaker at the Walter Burley Griffin Society's AGM last October, and kindly wrote this precis of his illustrated talk.

One rather neglected dimension in appreciating both the history and heritage significance of Castlecrag is its status in international terms as an early planned residential community. A planning history perspective on the genealogy of Castlecrag provides this broader context of ideas and precedents assimilated into the 1921 plan for Castlecrag. Yet Castlecrag remains more than the sum of such parts and in its own right emerges as a unique venture.

Walter Burley Griffin never gave much away as to his inspirations and influences. Yet his personal knowledge of major developments in the United States and Europe was considerable. He had studied at the University of Illinois, served a term as Secretary of the City Club of Chicago's Town Planning Committee, met leading experts, and travelled to Europe. While restlessly striving for originality, he remained a product of his times.

Griffin was a progressive suburbanite. He wrote in 1912 that "it is to be hoped that the individual house and grounds will long be the dominant features of our cities". The suburb expressed a desire to escape the unhealthy chaos of inner city tenements, terraces and townhouses for something more spacious and green further out. In contemporary parlance it was the idea of securing a marriage of town and country. The first suburbs offered this opportunity for the elite. John Nash's Park Village West in London was a classic prototype. In America the leafy lakeside planned resort community of Tuxedo Park, north of New York City, became a gated retreat for Wall Street millionaires from the 1880s.

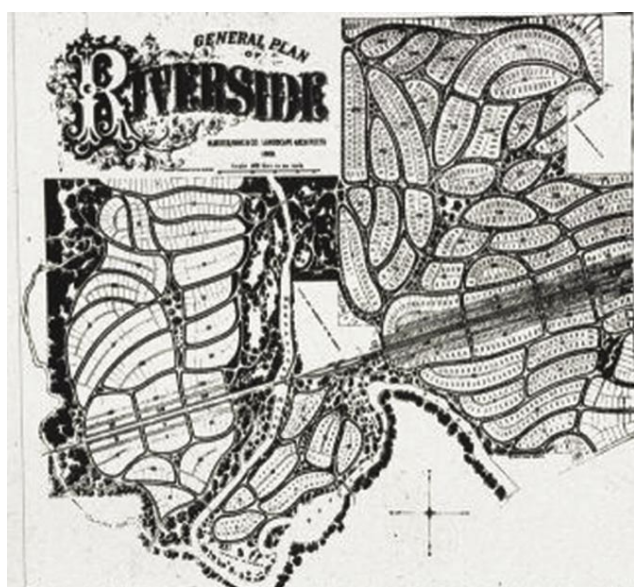
The garden city and suburb movement adapted this lifestyle for the mass market. The outcome of Ebenezer Howard's philosophy of a new urban civilisation, Letchworth Garden City (1903) was the first planned suburban town. At the same time as its innovative precinct plans were definitive physical expressions of neighbourliness and a new standard for house-and-garden living, Letchworth also gained a reputation for social experimentation. Early residents gained the reputation as eccentrics. At the Cloisters, Annie Lawrence attracted advanced social thinkers with connections to theosophy, the doctrine that the Griffins become familiar with in the 1920s.

The origins of Hampstead Garden Suburb (1904) lay in twin aspirations of social reformer Henrietta Barnett to create affordable housing opportunities and to save attractive countryside from unplanned speculative suburban development. The idea of using housing and land development as a means to acquire open space, maintain amenity and advance conservationist ideals was an enlightened one, and we also see it in Castlecrag. Designer Raymond Unwin at both Letchworth and Hampstead developed an innovative approach to suburban site planning that would have global impacts. His cul de sacs, common allotments at the rear of houses, and narrow walkways or "twittens" were features which surface in Griffin's design.

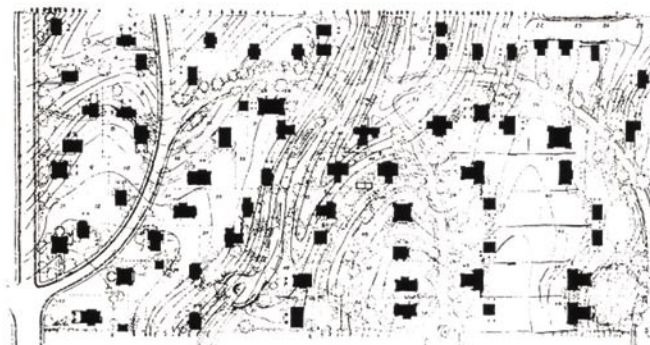
But whatever Griffin adapted in urban design terms was matched by his enthusiasm for the social ideals being expressed. He saw in such developments a new sense-of-community, a breakthrough commitment to collective social organisation, and the importance of places controlling their own destinies. He appreciated the significance of unified land ownership for both physical design ends and social justice. When he first arrived in Australia he was tagged as a 'Single Taxer' and a disciple of land reformer Henry George. The Melbourne reform journal *Progress* reported in September 1913 that Griffin had made a "special study" of "the Garden City and Town-planning movement" with its "new conception of social obligations".

American influences in residential planning would have made the major and enduring impact on Griffin. The planned residential community became part of repertoire of the landscape architect alongside the great city park, the park system, and the campus. Exclusive and speculative projects were frequently the setting for progressive planning ideas because of the involvement of name designers. The early marketing of Castlecrag by the Greater Sydney Development Association would emulate this approach. A 1922 advertisement spoke of a coming "first-class, safeguarded, homogeneous, residential waterside suburb .... the First Exclusive Residential District in Sydney .... Safeguarded Homes on Park-ways, Drives and Recreation Spaces, Golf Links and Moorings".

Riverside near Chicago - planned several years



Plan of Riverside, Chicago, by Olmstead and Vaux (1869)  
 (From Cynthia Girling and Kenneth Helphand, *Yard Street Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space*, John Wiley, 1994)



Resubdivision plan for EW Clark, Grinnell, Iowa (1912)  
 (from Peter Harrison, Walter Burley Griffin, Landscape Architect, MA thesis, University of NSW, 1970)

before Griffin was born by the legendary Frederick Law Olmsted Senior – was a community plan of great historical significance and there are demonstrable similarities with Castlecrag. It featured gently curved streets, inliers of open space, waterfront public reserves, and an active reforestation program for a site described as "low, flat, mirey, and forelorn". While many subsequent planned communities laboured under quite complex and contrived layouts, the organic informality of Riverside set the mould for a series of romantic estates coast to coast. The Olmsted Brothers – Frederick's son and step-son – captured this quality in their collaborations at Roland Park, Baltimore (1897), Forest Hills Gardens in New York (1908), and Huntington Palisades and Palos Verdes (both from the 1920s) in Los Angeles. Restrictive covenants to ensure high building quality and social cohesiveness were standard and also roll over into Castlecrag.

Although Griffin had designed houses and gardens in pre-subdivided estates (notably his work in Beverley, Chicago and in Milliken Place, Decatur), when the world discovered Griffin as town planner immediately after his success in the 1912 Canberra competition. American property interests were first to pounce, and a succession of small community plans enabled Griffin to experiment in residential planning schemes. His theoretical concepts were best expressed in a joint entry in the 1912 City Club of Chicago residential subdivision competition where, like many competitors, the planned neighbourhood becomes the basic building block of the city.

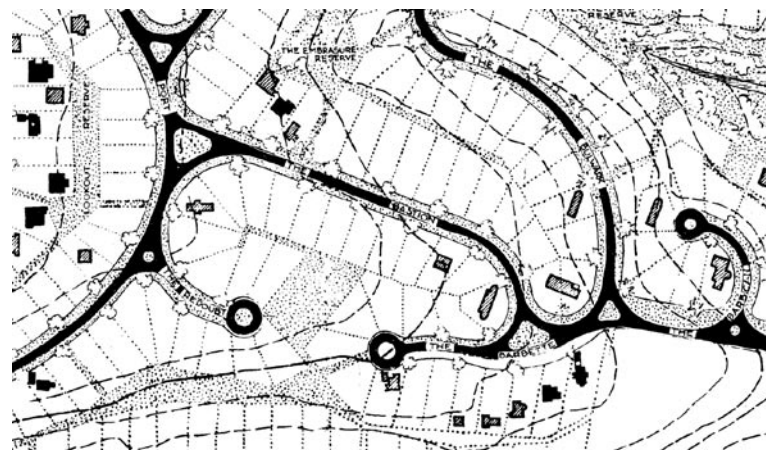
Peter Harrison in 1970 claimed that Griffin first articulated his commitment to the environment in a residential community in the Trier neighbourhood in Winnetka quoting him on "a determination to preserve for the neighbourhood a maximum of the site's natural beauty and to secure that

garden charm which alone justifies living out in the suburbs". Harrison also described a re-subdivision scheme in Grinnell, Iowa as "like a fragment of Olmsted's Riverside". In his 1917 paper "Planning for Economy", Griffin himself wrote of the latter's qualities which anticipate Castlecrag as "conforming the features to the natural topography ... producing sites everywhere high in respect to their frontages and outlooks, yet all in strict order, in a parklike, informal environment, and with routes accentuated with parks ... [and] in addition, a neighbourly system of inter-communication". Rock Crest/Rock Glen in Mason City, Iowa is the most realised example of this nature-sensitive community planning.

In Australia, the projects that first connect Griffin's evolving site planning approach with generic concepts are at Eaglemont in Melbourne: the Summit (1914) and Glenard Estates (1916). These were real estate ventures with town planning ideals applied to secure good returns from land sales. Although precursors of Castlecrag in plan form, they lack the ideological sophistication of the Sydney suburb. But his plans still went far beyond any other suburban subdivision scheme of the time in retaining natural flora and other 'scenic attractions'. Covenants in the ownership titles of surrounding landowners gave residents part-share in the park areas abutting their land.

But it is the Castlecrag plan which decisively folds in progressive design influences that had been in the air for some years:

- The central notion of design creating community
- The idea of the exclusive estate
- The house-and-garden dream
- The aesthetic grouping of houses in a unified whole
- The legal covenants for development and social control
- The anticipation of the planned neighbourhood unit concept
- The desire to attract like-minded individuals to create a social sense of place
- The site plan sensitive to topographic constraints and possibilities
- The curvilinear roads just wide enough for residential traffic
- The roundabout traffic islands
- The culs-de-sac
- The pedestrian pathways
- The planned open space and provision of internal parks
- The attention to community facilities
- The attention to views



Detail from plan of Castlecrag and Haven Estates, prepared in 1932 by GSDA, the Griffins' office showing reserves and walkways shaded.

- The nurturing of natural beauty
- The respect for the public realm

We can see all these features coming and they help us appreciate that Castlecrag was situated firmly within the mainstream evolution of residential site planning in global terms. They cumulatively underscore the planning history significance of Castlecrag.

But this is not to conclude that Castlecrag is a derivative concoction of site planning innovations from preceding developments. As sophisticated as its integration of these elements was, there was still much more to it architecturally, culturally, and ecologically. As early photographs of the small mayan-like houses studding a rough-hewn landscape testify, there was a lot more going on. As James Weirick argued in his essay "Beyond the Garden Suburb" (Planning History, 1995), Castlecrag was not your typical planned garden subdivision. Nora Cooper said as much in *Australian Home Beautiful* in 1929: " 'suburban' is the wrong word to apply to Castle Crag. A 'suburb', ... [is] an unwilling combination of [town and country], and either neat and shining, or cheap and nasty .... Castle Crag, though only a short bus ride from Milson's Point, is not a suburb in the ordinary sense at all. Its rocky crags... remain unscarred and unblasted ... its trees are still intact, its natural wildflowers still bloom profusely every year".

Griffin called this "land planning", not town planning: a form of "occupational conservation". This thoroughgoing, utterly site-driven integration of built and natural forms adds a unique quality to the significance of the place. It was the essence of "the Castlecrag idea" as Griffin himself expressed it in a 1930 article in *Highway*: "The premise is

that the indigenous rocks, shrubs and trees form a complete picturesque garden setting better than any substitute that would be introduced or constructed ... Otherwise the value of the scenery of Middle Harbour becomes lost with occupation ... The Castlecrag idea is that houses should be subordinate to the landscape”.

This is what really makes the vision of the original Castlecrag plan such an extraordinary one. It contributes to the specialness of the place today. It needs to be vigilantly conserved for present and future generations. And it clinches the case for Castlecrag to assume its rightful place in the pantheon of early planned communities worldwide. Castlecrag not only drew on world's best practice, it demonstrably contributed to it..

## **WELCOME TO NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Society welcomes new committee members Margaret Petrykowski, Stuart Read, Colleen Fry and Professor Geoff Sherington. Brief descriptions of Margaret's and Stuart's achievements and the expertise they bring to the Society are given below. Colleen's and Geoff's will appear in the next newsletter.

### **Margaret Petrykowski**

B Arch UTS, M Urb Design, Sydney University, Registered Architect 4858

Margaret Petrykowski is the Director of Urban Design in the NSW Government Architect's Office.

Margaret is a multi award-winning architect and urban designer with Master of Urban Design from University of Sydney and over 20 years of professional experience. She is the recipient of the 1997 National Association of Women in Construction Vision Award sponsored by Lend Lease for her contribution to the profession of architecture and the promotion of women in the profession.

Margaret heads key urban design projects and works closely with the NSW Government Architect on projects of state significance, including: major civic upgrade projects, such as the upgrade of the main street in Sydney, George Street and the Railway Square redevelopment; together with master plans for city centres such as Parramatta, Newcastle, Hurstville and Penrith.

In 1997 the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning appointed Margaret to the Urban Design Advisory Committee and prior to that she has held a position of the Urban Design Specialist for Pyrmont and Ultimo redevelopment.

Margaret combines hands-on design with planning and formulation of planning policies and is an active member of the RAlA Housing and Urban Design Committee, the PIA Urban Design Chapter Committee and the Urban Design Advisory Panel for the University of Sydney, where she taught for 9 years, between 1991-2000, in the Master of Urban Design programme.

Margaret's work focuses on developing innovative approaches to the planning on challenging sites, such as the Victoria Park site in Green Square, where the storm-water management strategy has driven the site's urban framework and the North Parramatta Government Precinct Master Plan, where the new development is seamlessly integrated with the site's heritage.

### **Stuart Read**

Stuart has worked since 1997 for the NSW Heritage Office on better planning instruments and management of historic gardens and cultural landscapes in Western Sydney and around NSW. He has a Bachelor of Horticulture and a post graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University, New Zealand. Stuart has worked in environment impact assessment and heritage conservation since 1991, briefly for the private sector, then for the Australian Heritage Commission on natural and cultural heritage, Environment Australia's World Heritage Biodiversity Units on nominations to the W.H.List and a national Biodiversity Strategy.

Stuart has a keen interest in the identification and conservation of cultural landscapes, cultural layers in natural landscapes, historic parks, trees, urban design and views. Outside work, he has become increasingly interested in history and particularly landscape and garden history. Stuart served on the NSW National Trust's Parks & Gardens Classification Committee for 4 years, advising on better planning and management of gardens and parks, and contributing to a 2003 publication on 'Interwar Gardens', a little-researched field to date.

He has long been involved with the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS), first on the committee of the ACT, Monaro & Riverina Branch, from 1997 the Sydney & Northern NSW Branch, and from 2001 on the National Management Committee. A recent project has been consulting across the country to gain agreement, prepare and submit to Canberra a 'tentative list' of gardens for the Commonwealth National List.

The AGHS has a proud history of research, publication (including the ground-breaking 2002

*Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens*, and a well-respected journal), advocacy and awareness-raising of the rich legacy of Australian garden making. Mr Read is currently the Vice-President of the Sydney & Northern NSW Branch Committee of the AGHS.

## HUGH BUHRICH (1911 - 2004)

### Exceptional architect

In June last year Castlecrag lost an exceptionally talented long-term resident when Hugh Buhrich died at the age of 93. Educated in Germany, including a period of study in Berlin with the pioneer modern architect Hans Poelzig, Hugh arrived in Australia in 1939 with his architect wife Eva after they fled the rise of Nazism.

In the late 1940s they built their first Castlecrag house at 315 Edinburgh Road which was located on a superb bushland lot purchased from Marion's friends in Chicago.

Between 1968 and 1972 Hugh and Eva built their second house at 375 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag in which Hugh lived until his death. Both houses remain in the family. This second house on the waterfront at the end of the peninsula extends from an early knitlock building designed by Walter Burley Griffin for the Herbert family. 375 Edinburgh Road is one of Sydney's most significant houses of the Modern period. It is one of the few Modern houses listed by the National Trust and is listed as a heritage item by Willoughby Council.

At the time of its listing on the State Heritage Register in 2001, the Buhrich House was described

as featuring 'a unique combination of off-the-shelf materials, hand-crafted features, modelling of architectural space and relationship to the site' (*Heritage*, the newsletter of the NSW Heritage Office and Heritage Council of NSW).

Recently honoured as the 'House of the Decade' for the 1970s by the RAI (NSW Chapter), the Buhrich House II was described by Professor James Weirick, a member of the selection panel, as demonstrating 'the true fusion of European modernism with the Australian landscape. The fundamental principles of organic spatial planning which Hugh Buhrich gained from Hans Poelzig in Berlin in the 1930s are here combined with the life forms of nature in a miraculous light-filled cave above Middle Harbour'.

The ingenuity and character of Hugh Buhrich's architecture is also clearly evident in his small scale additions to the Duncan House and Cheong House, both Griffin houses at Castlecrag. In each instance, these were a special response to the needs of his friends and clients, the Duncans and the Souhamis. The works drew strength from a creative tension between European modernism and the organic forms of Griffin's sandstone architecture. His advice to Miss Rogers not to add to the Creswick House was very perceptive and sensitive to the Griffin values. Hugh is also greatly appreciated for his significant contribution, with Eva, to the campaign to save the Willoughby Incinerator in the 1970s, and for his overall contribution to the creative spirit of Castlecrag.

**Editors' note:** with thanks to Peter Moffitt and the newsletter of the Castlecrag Progress Association.




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### MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to:  
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post to  
The Treasurer c/- 140 Edinburgh Rd, Castlecrag,  
2068

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

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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 opposite.

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