

News Update 79

August 2023

RESTORATION AUSTRALIA – THE DUNCAN HOUSE

The first episode of this season's "Restoration Australia" on ABC TV featured the Duncan House at Castlecrag. It screened on Sunday 16 July and can be watched on ABC iView. Designed by the Griffins and built in 1934, this house has been sensitively restored and the large addition built in the 1990s has been transformed to be more sympathetic to the original Griffin house.

RESTORATION CASTLECRAG – THE DUNCAN HOUSE TALK SUNDAY 13 AUGUST

We are delighted to have Professor Anthony Burke, the presenter of "Restoration Australia" give a talk on his discovery of Castlecrag and the Duncan House, how he sees the Griffins' work relate to Australian architecture, and behind the scenes stories of the filming of the Duncan House.

Anthony Burke is a Professor of Architecture and Course Director for the Master of Architecture in the Faculty of Design Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney. He has been host and presenter of the ABC TV's "Restoration Australia" since 2019.

Tickets are strictly limited and essential for this special event at the Marion Mahony Griffin Hall, Glenaeon Infants School, Castlecrag.

Adults \$40, Members \$30.

Time 10.30am to 11.30am. Book at Trybooking https://www.trybooking.com/1088873

RIGHT: Annette and Michael Pitman in their home with ABC TV presenter Professor Anthony Burke.

RESTORATION CASTLECRAG – GUIDED WALK AND OPEN HOUSE

Also on Sunday 13 August there will be two guided walks to the Duncan House and then a special viewing of its interiors and garden.

Tickets are strictly limited and essential for this special event that will depart from the Marion Mahony Griffin Hall, Glenaeon School, Castlecrag.

Adults \$50, Members \$40.

1st tour time: 11.45am to 1.15pm **2nd tour time**: 1.45pm to 3.15pm

Book at Trybooking

https://www.trybooking.com/1088947

NOTE: People wishing to do both the talk and the open house can have lunch at Castlecrag café Walter Providore or at The Incinerator Café, Small St, Willoughby.



SCULPTURETO HONOUR MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN, AND THE COMMUNITY PARK

Good news at last – after more than two years of delays caused by unexpected Council decisions, the Council has now approved funding to turn two of the eight car spaces in the carpark at the corner of The Postern and Edinburgh Road into a mini park where the sculpture to honour and celebrate Marion Mahony Griffin will be installed.

Many of the Society's members and friends have given generously to the sculpture. So it is a relief and also very exciting to at long last be able to give prominent artist / sculptor Sandra Pitkin the go ahead to start construction of the sculpture.

Willoughby City Council prepared an excellent landscape plan for the community park (published in newsletter issue 75, July 2021) to replace the small eight car carpark. The landscape plan included a very suitable location for the sculpture. Despite very considerable support for the landscaped park, there were many who wanted the carpark to be retained. At the Council meeting of 12 July 2021 the Councillors voted to defer implementation of the park until an alternate site for the eight public car parking spaces was resolved.

Late that same month, the Society wrote to Council's Traffic Committee requesting that two of the car spaces in The Postern be changed from unrestricted parking to 1 hour restricted parking as are the eight car spaces in the little carpark. This was to enable two of the car spaces in the small carpark to become a tiny park and create a small space where the sculpture to honour Marion Mahony Griffin can be installed as planned by Willoughby City Council.

The Traffic Committee investigated, approved and then implemented three car spaces with signs in The Postern for 2 hour restricted parking in March 2022.

Following that with the support of the Mayor and Ward Councillors, at its November meeting last year the Council voted to approve the removal of two car spaces in the carpark to enable the installation of the sculpture, and that funding for it should be



Detail of half scale prototype. Photo Sandra Pitkin 2023

included in the 2023/2024 Draft Operational Plan. The Society is now very pleased to announce the funding was approved by Council at its meeting on 26 June 2023.

After so many delays we are extremely grateful to Sandra Pitkin for her patience, kindly accommodating all the delays for the sculpture that we all planned to be made and installed in 2021, the sesquicentenary year of Marion Mahony's birth and also the centenary year of the Griffins' Castlecrag.

With the lengthy delays over almost three years there have been significant increases in the costs of the sculpture particularly for the copper and stainless steel materials, transportation and engineering consultancy. The Society is thus embarking on further fundraising for the sculpture to make up the \$14,000 shortfall.

BIM'S BENCH

An initiative of the Castlecrag Progress Association, this bench seat was recently installed in memory of Bim Hilder MBE the designer / sculptor of the Griffin Memorial Fountain that was commissioned to celebrate the Centenary of the Willoughby Municipality and officially unveiled in 1965.



New bench commemorates Bim Hilder the designer / sculptor of the Griffin Memorial Fountain, Castlecrag.

The fountain and new bench seat are at the intersection of Edinburgh Road and Sortie Port, Castlecrag. Bim was employed as a carpenter and stonemason by the Griffins and lived in the Crag for over 70 years becoming one of its most celebrated and successful artists. One of his best known works is the 'wall enrichment' sculpture of 1962 for the Reserve Bank building in Martin Place. Bim Hilder was awarded an OBE for his services to art in 1978.

The bronze plaque with the banksia relief was designed by Bim for the Castlecrag community in the 1970s and there are a number of them in many of the Castlecrag reserves and a couple of road islands.

A REFRESHING EXPERIENCE TO SAVOUR: BHATIA HOUSE LUCKNOW A TRIBUTE TO WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN

In March this year Dr Rani Massey had her paper titled "Space Resonates with Inspirational Memories: W.B. Griffin, Lucknow Chapter" published online at https://www.indiannetworkformemorystudies.com/wps/spaceresonates-inspirational-memories-rani-massey/

The Society is indebted to Dr Massey for subsequent research and her interviews about the Bhatia family and the house the late Dr B B Bhatia commissioned W B Griffin to design for him and his family in Lucknow. The Bhatia House is perhaps one of the last Griffin buildings that remain in Lucknow.

On 9th April 2023 (Easter Sunday), my husband and I were extremely privileged to pay a visit to the Bhatia House, Lucknow (India), designed and built by the iconic American architect Walter Burley Griffin, way back in 1936 (completed by his wife Marion Mahony Griffin in 1937 after his death). It remains perhaps his only construction here in Lucknow – a heritage and a rich legacy. Griffin has been acclaimed for his passionate foray into landscape architecture in three diverse continents – America (citizen), Australia and finally India. Imbued with a free and democratic spirit, he ventured out to far flung unknown lands in passionate pursuit of work and experience. In all his endeavours, he was assisted and encouraged by his creative architect wife Marion Mahony who worked ceaselessly to support his projects - making drafts, water colour paintings and sketches. They were unfortunately able to spend only a brief period in Lucknow (1935-37), and yet their aesthetic and scientific impact here on buildings was immense. The old civilisation inspired new creative aspirations in architecture, fostering opportunity to unite Eastern architecture with Western Modernism.

My keen interest and curiosity on this subject, especially his works pertaining to Lucknow, made me delve deeper, opening many archival closets, and reading resource material by expert authorities on architecture. I fitted into the jigsaw puzzle of his life, his philosophy and brilliant works which all inspired me further. What ensued was the culmination of my paper entitled "Space Resonates with Inspirational Memories: W B Griffin, Lucknow Chapter", published online by Indian Network for Memory Studies, IIT Madras.

We (husband and myself) set off along the Gomti River without a house number or a prior appointment, with great trepidation. My eyes surveyed the gate post with the names of the occupants and my spirits soared high on seeing the typical Griffin design on the gate post, an interesting interlinked pattern ('jaali'), and who did we see on the long drive way bordered with tall trees? We introduced ourselves and he happened to be Avichal, the son of Dr Asha Bhatia daughter-in-law of the eminent, late Dr Bir Bhan Bhatia, member of the Royal College of Physicians London, Principal of King George's Medical College, Lucknow (1946-49), and recipient of Padma Shri Award (1954) for his contribution to medicine. He lived in this house in the latter years of his life (death in 1962). On his special request, Griffin had undertaken the building of the Bhatia house almost a century ago back in 1936.

With great ease Avichal welcomed us and we stepped into the serene, cool environment of 'Shanti Sadan' (peaceful abode), to see this historic house, nestled amidst the greenery – a horizontally modern structure, reminiscent of the Prairie influence. It has the same design ('jaali') running along its façade at two levels on the parapet. The lush greenery and an array of exotic plants of every hue, brought from all over the world, captivated our hearts and reminded me of the Romantic poets. Bhatia's neighbour and





LEFT: Bhatia House and gate post. Photographs Vijay Massey 2023.

family friend Mr P C Kanjilal, chief Conservator of Forests, had graciously gifted them with plants in the 1940s. We rambled along the gardens while we waited for the very senior Dr Asha Bhatia and used our shutterbugs to capture the beautiful memories to be shared. There were small lotus ponds, flocks and pink adenium blooming in Spring time, creating a spectacle of pristine beauty.

Our attention now shifted to artefacts added through the years – statues and murals all over the gardens and front edifice – a mural of a lady carrying a vessel of 'mangal kalash' (auspicious water), and a mural of a tiger. In the back garden, amongst the fragrant Jasmine flower bushes and native creepers, stood a statue of a lady with a vessel under the wrought iron canopy standing on a base of sea shells which would shine in the moonlight like crystals – a mesmerising sight for sure. All the statues and murals were gifts added later by a family friend, the renowned Shidhar Mahapatra, Head, Department of Sculpture, Arts College, Lucknow. Also, the old undiscernible tennis courts are reminiscent of the bygone colonial days.

We were made to observe the original flooring of the front verandah - a grey green of polished cement with art deco patterns in black (French Arts before World War 1); and the rich red oxide drawing room floors with a border in black terrazzo (composite material with chips of stone, marble etc); partitioned rooms, almost cubicles; inventive roofing, made out of inverted concrete troughs ('khaprel' type), allowing space for air and creating good insulation; thick brick walls and small exterior openings to shut off the intense summer heat here with natural yet scientific insulation and light; and concealed wiring (a new concept then). The geometrical patterns inspired by nature on the almirahs, doors and small upper storey display the influence of the Chicago-based Prairie School architectural style.



Grey green polished cement floor of front verandah with geometric pattern in black. Photo Vijay Massey 2023.



Dr Asha Bhatia (left) with Dr Rani Massey in the front verandah with Griffin designed mesh doors. Photo Vijay Massey 2023.

Our new-found interest went a few notches up, as Avichal showed us around the adjacent half portion of the house belonging to his uncle, Lt Col R B Bhatia which has fragrant Magnolias; Japanese ponds, and fish ponds which earlier had black Mollies (defunct); and an aviary with only creepers instead of the love birds which the bird traders from 'Nakkhas' (in old city) would buy. We were horrified to hear how these birds would kill each other out of jealousy.

The unexpected sight of a Turkish bath, in complete disarray with grey-white broken marble, overlooking the garden through a window, startled us. There was a statue of a cow/bull out of whose spout the water would flow into the tub. Note it was not like the gargoyle, a grotesque figure but considered a sacred animal here; with also the function being different.

Seating ourselves on the front verandah, we were greeted by the gracious and poised Dr Asha Bhatia (a retired gynaecologist from King George's Medical College), the daughter-in-law of late Dr Bir Bhan Bhatia. Even now at the age of over 90 years, she exudes a spirit of self-will and grit. Narrating her turbulent past with alacrity - WW II, while in Burma as a teenager; being taught to hide in trenches with cotton balls in their ears as bombs were hurled; her family as volunteers in the Propaganda Campaign, supporting the Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose in Burma; their escape to Lahore (in India earlier), till another trauma, that of Partition between India and Pakistan with its horrifying events of mass killings and separations; and their long challenging journey as refugees, sometimes in trucks to India. Her father, T N Sinha in the Education Department and a linguist, joined them later.

Her illustrious father-in-law, whose memory she cherishes, brought her into this house as a young bride to his son Dr K B Bhatia, Head of Medicine, KGMC. During this period of the 1960s she also had to face the ravages of Lucknow floods, when the Bhatia House was inundated with flood waters. Dr Asha Bhatia says she never looks back on all these experiences as misfortunes, instead she remains positive. She went on to work for the Family Planning Association of India, and for Primary Health Centres in Uttar Pradesh and many more.

She remains grateful and her house is open to guests. The importance accorded to this house is rightly so because at present it is probably the only remnant left of the legacy of Walter Burley Griffin in Lucknow, especially as it has become a hub for research students of architecture from all over the world. Unfortunately today, this iconic house is half-hidden by high-rise buildings, some unauthorised, and it needs to be preserved.

The icing on the cake was on October 22nd 2019, when in the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage Awards in the State capital Lucknow, the prestigious Bhatia House built by Walter Burley Griffin figured in the merit of distinction, along with Jahangirabad Palace and Mahmudabad Estate – both palaces Griffin was engaged with through his architecture. This is a fitting tribute to his architectural achievements.

That Griffin was ahead of his times is reflected through his relatively modern architecture with local specificity, especially with reference to the Bhatia House, Lucknow. On the eve of his visit to India, on being asked by a journalist whether he would follow the Indian style, Griffin's response was "No, I'm going to lead it".

Dr Rani Massey



Marble Turkish bath with distinctive Griffin windows. Photo Vijay Massey 2023.

MEMORIES OF THE BHATIA HOUSE BY RITU PASRICHA, GRANDDAUGHTER OF DR B B BHATIA

An epitome of kindness and goodness, 'Shanti Sadan' was the perfect, peaceful abode my dad, Dr K B Bhatia loved dearly. It was his inherent labour and creative hardwork which helped to maintain this beautiful, unique structure, as it stands today. His ever green fingers added to the pristine green cover, making it the lungs of New Hyderabad. He was passionate about gardening and reading and anything of beauty always caught his eye. As a boy he loved horses and was a proud owner of one which he rode around the house as the area was forested with just two houses in the vicinity. As a young boy of 12–13 he often sat through many meetings with his dad and Mr Griffin while planning the house. So he was able to give us so much insightful information regarding the house every time a team visited from Chicago or Australia.

When my mother Dr Asha Bhatia walked through the gates of 'Shanti Sadan' way back in 1957 as a young medical student to meet Dr B. B. Bhatia in connection with some medical work, little did she know that the portals of this beautiful house would become her home forever. She stood by my father with exemplary zeal in nurturing and mothering this lovely home even after he passed away in 2015. The house also won the INTACH Heritage award in the private home category in 2019....the award for which was received by her and my father's younger brother. She saw the house underwater during two big floods in the city of Lucknow in 1960 and 1971. She helped bring back the house to its former glory after a lot of toil and labour. Today at the age of 90, the house is her most peaceful space where she lives amongst beautiful memories of bygone days and fluttering butterflies and chirping birds.

To describe this beautiful home in a few words is a daunting task... this home gave me the best childhood I could hope for... climbing trees, sitting on rooftops, dip in the icy cool well water, running through potato and corn cultivation, plucking home grown mangoes and lychees and of course enjoying the fabulous tandoor delicacies in the kitchen designed by Mr Griffin. As a young girl I was often scared to go from one corner of the house to the other (where the dining room was)... given its tremendous length. The house I felt was shaped like a gigantic ship... My two children are the only great grandchildren of Dr B B Bhatia who were born in Lucknow and have therefore stayed here for long periods of time, making them cherish 'Shanti Sadan' as much as I do. Its double layer insulated walls make it a very summer friendly house though of course I love visiting it in any season to take in its scents and changing foliage and of course the rich ethos and history it embodies.

MEMORIES OF THE BHATIA HOUSE BY LT COL (RETD) R B BHATIA, YOUNGER SON OF DR B B BHATIA

Wife: Late Lalita Bhatia. Children: Ashish Bhatia (Son), Shalini Bhatia Bahadur (Daughter) who kindly typed out these memories of her 89 year old father.

I, Ravi Bhushan Bhatia, owner and resident of the north part of Shanti Sadan, New Hyderabad, Lucknow, was born in 1934 in Lucknow. I remember living on the premises of the King George's Medical College where my father was a director of the Pharmacology Department. He later became Principal of the College in 1946.

When Walter Burley Griffin was commissioned to design the library at the University of Lucknow in 1935, my father sought out a meeting with him one lunchtime and requested him to design a house for him on some land he had purchased recently. Hence came about the beautiful house that I have had the privilege to live in since I was about 3 or 4 years old, and post my services in the Indian Army, for forty years (1983 to the present times).

You already know many aspects of the house, so I will mention something different. Under what is currently my bedroom, we had a basement, a 'taykhana'. All the surplus construction material from the house once it had been built was stored here. This basement was sealed some years later as we had no particular use for it.

As children, we had a horse which was kept next to the quarters for the domestic help. We used to enjoy rides on it.

The room on the second floor, which was subsequently converted into a bedroom by me, was initially a 'barsati' — an open verandah with only pillars and a roof, which was particularly popular for use by us children in the monsoon months. Monsoon is a special season in India.



Lt Col R B Bhatia in the Bhatia House's driveway Photo by granddaughter Gayatri from rooftop of 'Shanti Sadan' 2018.

The house has double walls (made possibly from 'gara' – concrete, the mixture of cement, lime, perhaps gravel) and also a double layered roof (possibly with 'sarya' – iron bars for support), which makes it very cool to live in in the summers. The high ventilators, with the cement grill running all along the house at the ground floor roof level outside these ventilators, adds to the coolness inside the house during the summer months as the breeze can flow freely inside.

In addition, we had a well in the house, for watering the big gardens at the front and back, drawing adequate water for our personal use, as well as moistening the dried 'khus' – also commonly known as 'vetiver' – grass mats that were hung from doors and windows around the house. These were watered constantly with pipes in the summer so as to keep the indoors cool. With the wind from outside came whiffs of khus as the water dripped down these mats. Khus grass has a refreshing, welcoming fragrance as it is used in scents and incense too, and continues to stay strong in my memory.

It is my privilege to continue living in this beautiful home.

WHAT REMAINS OF THE GRIFFINS' PLANS FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL?

Ideally, one would like to imagine what the city, envisaged by Walter and Marion, could have looked like. Griffin Society member Rosemarie Willett, in her book The National Capital in the National Interest (self published, 2019) has obliged by taking the reader on 'a train trip to visit the city that Walter Burley Griffin designed in 1912'. She discusses the basic design elements, the historical changes, the follies and opportunities lost, and contemporary economic, political and planning challenges to their integrity.

At the same time, a phenomenon of revival of elements of the Griffins' Plan has been significant in Canberra's current urban development. Most publicised is the central tramway network Metro Light Rail. Secondly, Griffin-intended medium density residential mixed uses developments, allowing people to congregate in public spaces amidst recreational and cultural facilities, are emerging in Campbell, along Constitution Avenue and Northbourne Avenue, at New Acton, Kingston Foreshores, Dairy Flat and Yarralumla. Vistas to Capital Hill, Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain are being rediscovered.

The planned layout of Kingston Foreshore (1988) was a homage to Griffin by the planner Colin Stewart by extending his original geometry and land

uses. Urban renewal at the eastern end of Stuart Street, Griffith, is highlighting one of Griffin's great radials. Developers and the real estate industry are justly claiming Griffin in such instances.

In his book Canberra Following Griffin (National Archives of Australia, 2002), Paul Reid wrote 'Between the two axes of the Causeway and Wentworth Avenue a complete piece of Griffin's Plan miraculously appeared,' embraced by the Kingston Foreshore development [pages 334–9]. The National Arboretum Canberra fulfils a Griffin proposal. Romaldo Giurgola's new Parliament House conveys a host of the elements that Griffin envisaged for his Capitol on Kurrajong Hill.

Basic elements of the original plan have been lost, discarded or degraded, yet there endure in plain sight a three-dimensional structure, symbolic street layout, landscape design, vistas and evidence of the Griffins' (Walter and Marion) art, creativity, social and environmental values, political ideas, aesthetics, consummate skills and planning ideals (organic city, in harmony with landscape, efficiency, spaces as design elements, dispersed employment centres, community development).

Many of these assets, major features of the statutory National Capital Plan are under threat. Current concerns include the National Triangle, the Land and Water Axes, major avenues (such as Commonwealth, University, Limestone, Majura, Adelaide and Anzac Parade), loss of landscape vistas, City Hill, West Basin, the symmetry and symbolism of the Central National Area, the Pialligo Redwoods forest, Yarralumla Incinerator, the land bank for future national capital purposes, the dual governance and planning system, incapacity of the NCA, disinterest of the Commonwealth Government and Parliament and Canberra's lack of due National or World Heritage status.

Griffin's competition-winning Plan was gazetted in 1925, to ensure its integrity. Through a rigorous statutory process, no less than ninety Amendments were made by 2020, ranging from positive adaptations to follies. The NCA's Griffin Legacy 2004, four statutory Griffin Legacy Amendments and new Policy Framework of 2007 resulted from a wholesale, public and expert review of the Plan by the NCA, validated and enlarged the contemporary relevance, and for the NCA, established the Griffins' design as the most important reference in guiding future development. Also it demonstrated that Canberra has not realised its full potential.

The popularity and knowledge of Walter and Marion have grown enormously in recent years, particularly since Canberra's Centenary Year 2013, in the print and social media, the arts and folk arts, books, exhibitions and talks (ten annual Marion Mahony Griffin Lectures). Given the unfinished

and evolving agenda of planning the nation's capital, the revival of elements of the original plan and the likely threats of underlying forces, the Griffin Society's Canberra Chapter has put together an inventory of the surviving assets of Griffin's Plan and his other Canberra contributions. There is value in identifying these enduring elements of the Plan, Griffin's rightful status as the planner of the nation's capital and his Canberra accessible legacies.

Having identified the enduring elements, the Canberra Chapter plans to prepare a 'Griffin Trail' as a self-guided tour for residents and visitors to Canberra.

A potential Griffin Institute: The Canberra Chapter is also working towards a Griffin Institute proposal and has been promoting the idea to the NCA, the National Archives, and other interested organisations and individuals. A Griffin Institute was proposed in 2004 by the National Capital Authority as a museum, archive, library, research facilities and repository.

The goal would be interpretation and appreciation of the rich and dispersed assets to broaden the understanding and significance of the work of the Griffins, a memorial recording the achievements of a creative, spiritual, professional, aesthetic and influential partnership. The Canberra Chapter is working on this in collaboration with the NCA and the Australian National Archives promoting the concept, collecting materials and exploring potential options and feasibility.

Accession to rightful National and World Heritage status would enhance Canberra's potential as well as protect what's left of Griffin's original Plan. At the same time, as the national capital, Canberra reflects layers of planning and portrays Australia's achievements, priorities, values, flaws and foibles, identity and achievements, along with global trends in planning and international relations.

Brett Odgers

CASTLECRAG FAIR, SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER

The Castlecrag Progress Association is again organising the Castlecrag Fair after a four year pause. The Walter Burley Griffin Society will have a stall there providing information and educational material and selling its book *Visionaries in Suburbia: Griffin houses in the Sydney landscape,* Glenda Korporaal's book *Making Magic: The Marion Mahony Griffin Story* and also notepads and greeting cards with images of two of Marion Mahony Griffin's magnificent tree portraits.



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NEWS UPDATE

MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN AND THE LIVES AND WORKS OF **WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN** CELEBRATING



WB and MM Griffin, 1911, Australia's National Capital Competition drawings – National Archives of Australia, detail from NAA: A710_38

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

MEMBERSHIP ONLINE

Membership renewal for 2023 / 2024 is due in July 2023.

Pay online at

https://www.trybooking.com/CGFOU

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