



News Update 45

April 2007

DOUBLE EVENT IN CANBERRA, 4 AND 5 MAY

SPECIAL VIEWING AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, FRIDAY AFTERNOON 4 MAY

The National Library of Australia has kindly offered a special viewing of the Nicholls Collection to members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society in the afternoon of Friday 4 May.

The Nicholls Collection acquired by the Library in early 2006 has over 3,300 items of astonishing scope and complexity. The Library has conserved Marion Mahony Griffin's drawings on silk, and has been methodically cataloguing the entire collection, which is expected to be completed this month. Already much has been digitised and can be viewed on the Library's website.

Between 12.30pm to 4.30pm on 4 May, the Library will give members and friends of the Walter Burley Griffin Society a rare opportunity to see the Griffins' drafting and architectural skills in sketches, presentation drawings, correspondence, renderings and photographs of their works. View on 4th floor. Further information tel 02 6262 1370.

Free event but bookings essential: tel Brett Odgers 02 6286 4395, Kerry McKillop 02 9958 4516.

CANBERRA TOUR SATURDAY 5 MAY

This tour of Griffin's Canberra will be led by Griffin scholar and Society President Professor James Weirick who will relate the exciting story of the development of Canberra from sheep paddock to the national capital, covering the international competition, the Griffins' vision and plans, political intrigue and bureaucratic intervention.

Members booking form enclosed or download form from the Events webpage on www.griffinsociety.org

AMENDMENTS TO CANBERRA'S NATIONAL CAPITAL PLAN DETRIMENTAL TO THE GRIFFIN LEGACY

The four major Amendments that propose subdivision of, and high rise development in the immensely valuable public lands of Central Canberra and the foreshores of Lake Burley Griffin, would if not disallowed by Parliament, or withdrawn by the National Capital Authority (NCA), be a huge, detrimental and irreversible step in the history of the national capital.

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GRIFFIN SOCIETY WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FOR ITS WEBSITE

The Walter Burley Griffin Society website has won the 2007 *EnergyAustralia* National Trust Heritage Award for Interpretation and Presentation, Community Groups. Meredith Burgmann, President of the Legislative Council, and ABC broadcaster David Marr presented the awards at the Westin Hotel in Sydney on 12 March 2007.

The website, which went live in mid 2006, contains thirty-five sections covering the lives and works of Walter and Marion Griffin, the influences that shaped their work and an impressive photo gallery. These were written and designed by a team of 30 with expertise in various fields. The site also contains downloadable student activity sheets for primary and secondary school teachers.

In selecting the Griffin website for the award, the judges said: 'It is an impressive achievement from a community-based organisation, about important 20th century architects. It deals with their work both in Australia and overseas.'

Jacqueline Levett

AMENDMENTS TO CANBERRA'S NATIONAL CAPITAL PLAN DETRIMENTAL TO THE GRIFFIN LEGACY (continued from page 1)

Called 'The Griffin Legacy Amendments', they were prepared in 2006, but fail to reflect Griffin's ideals and intent for urban vitality, diversity, landscape design, constitutional symbolism, sustainability and a community friendly city as identified in 'The Griffin Legacy' study that the NCA published in 2004. Instead the Amendments, if carried out, would perpetuate the Canberra syndrome of isolated buildings, and dominance of the car, and introduce large areas of high-rise buildings that would rise above the tree canopy of the 'Bush Capital'. This is despite the good historical research contained in 'The Griffin Legacy' study.

The Amendments contain no urban design controls to ensure quality urban landscapes and architecture. There is a complete lack of statistical information and planning data. The NCA has claimed that this is in line with modern planning practice and that the detail would be arrived at in consultation with stakeholders. The NCA has given assurance that the stakeholders would include the community, but the Society is concerned that there is no legislative requirement for community consultation and cites the ASIO / ONA building to be built on Constitution Avenue where even the name of the occupant has not been made public until recently and the site specific details and requirements are likely to be suppressed for security reasons. Even with the less contentious buildings there is no right of appeal on the merits of any development approval.

The WBGs response

Professor James Weirick, President of the Walter Burley Griffin Society states "Canberra is more than a 'City Beautiful' plan, it is a living city facing complex environmental, social and economic challenges, which demand an alternative vision to the low-density, car-based city created by the NCDC in the 1960s. At the same time, the

landscape character of the city must be conserved in its ecological, aesthetic and cultural dimensions. Reconciling these imperatives requires more than a selective reading of Griffin's ideas to justify property development, it requires a commitment to social, environmental and economic sustainability."

The Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital & External Territories (JSC) held a roundtable public hearing on 23 February into the four Amendments to the National Capital Plan proposed by the NCA. Senator Ross Lightfoot, the Chairman of that Committee stated that: "The Griffin Legacy amendments are some of the most significant and far-reaching changes to the National Capital Plan ever undertaken."

The Society's President Professor James Weirick, Treasurer John Kabos and Canberra Chapter Chair Brett Odgers spoke on behalf of the Society at the all day roundtable meeting. The 10,000 word written submission prepared by Professor Weirick and Brett Odgers is available for viewing on the Parliamentary website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet/Griffin/subs/sub1.pdf.

JSC recommendations

On 22 March the JSC Chairman Senator Lightfoot and his committee of Senators and Members of the House of Representatives published its 80 page report, including a recommendation that the Griffin Legacy Amendments be disallowed so that the National Capital Authority has the opportunity to refine the Amendments, taking into account the issues raised in the Committee's report. This states that the evidence given at the roundtable public hearing questions the adequacy of parts of these amendments and that these criticisms cannot be easily dismissed.

The Report also included a recommendation that the NCA take appropriate steps to make submissions publicly available. This recommendation responds to the submissions made by the Society at the roundtable public hearing concerning the secrecy



NCA model at Regatta Point showing the Lake infill at West Basin with hotels, and at right, highrise around City Hill

the NCA attached to submissions and the source and nature of the submissions, which the NCA sought to justify on the basis of the Privacy Act. As the Society pointed out, the NCA could have complied with the Privacy Act by seeking the consent of people making submissions (a tick in the appropriate box) which the NCA had made no attempt to do. It was not until the publication of the Parliamentary Committee's report that it was disclosed that the vast majority of submissions were in the form of ticked boxes on a visitor form made available at Regatta Point, but those submissions were given the same weight by the NCA as submissions such as the Society's 10,000 word submission (1.5 and 1.6 page 2 of report).

Despite the JSC recommendations, and within hours of the release of the report, the Territories Minister Jim Lloyd declared he would not withdraw the Amendments. Not only did the Minister thus break with the convention that the executive give proper consideration to parliamentary committee reports, but he specifically rejected the first recommendation of the present report which simply requests the Minister to allow the JSC to inquire into every Draft Amendment to the National Capital Plan before he gives any approval.

The Society's written submission to the JSC and also an executive summary of it, can be downloaded from the News page of the Society's website at www.griffinsociety.org.

There is also a link to the Proof Committee Hansard of the JSC roundtable on Griffin Legacy Amendments, 23 February 2007, Canberra, on the same News webpage.

The JSC report tabled on 22 March is available on the Parliamentary committee's website: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet/Griffin/report.htm

Senate debate on disallowance

On 28 March the Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Bob Brown, moved that the four Amendments be disallowed. He was responding to advice from local Senate Greens candidate Kerrie Tucker regarding community concerns about democratic processes in the face of hugely significant but unjustified and rushed changes to the planning of central Canberra. Debate on the motion is set for 10 May.

How you can help

We have thus a breathing space and further opportunities to influence the NCA. To maximize the impact of the Senate debate, we need to lobby Senators on the basic issues of concern to the Society. Individual Senators can be identified for specific appeals and their email or other contacts from www.aph.gov.au/Senate or just address to Parliament House, Canberra. Key potential players include Senators Lightfoot, Lundy, Humphries, Joyce, Stott Despoja, Bartlett and Allison

(Democrats), all four Green Senators, Fielding, Trish Crossin and John Hogg. Labor has decided not to support the motion, at this stage, but Senators Lundy and Hogg are members of the JSC.

AMENDMENT 53 FOR ALBERT HALL PRECINCT – MORE CONTROVERSY

Hard on the heels of the four Amendments, the National Capital Authority (NCA) announced yet another controversial draft amendment to the National Capital Plan. Called Draft Amendment 53, it applies to a large area called the Albert Hall precinct that extends down to the foreshores of Lake Burley Griffin and is bounded by Commonwealth Avenue, Flynn Drive, and Coronation Drive. This area includes Albert Hall, which has served as a town hall for many years, the Canberra Hyatt Hotel and the open space of the road easements that permit beautiful uninterrupted views of the distant hills and lakeside peninsulas.

Amendment 53 provides for high rise and high density land uses on the southern lakeshore in the Albert Hall precinct. The proposal has been met by strenuous community objections expressed in the media and at a public meeting organised by the NCA at Regatta Point on 22 March.

Reporting on the meeting, the *Canberra Times* in an article titled "Expert blasts NCA scheme. Leave Albert Hall alone, says professor" on 25 March, stated that the former chair of the ACT Heritage Committee, Professor John Mulvaney, had said that: "As a major heritage precinct, it should not become cluttered with other structures for which the NCA, in any case, appears to have no designated function". The *Canberra Times* article went on to state that Professor Mulvaney "was also critical of an eight-storey 'landmark' building, proposed for the western side of Constitution Avenue, which he said was justified at the meeting for providing a balance with the National Library".

"This suggests that the NCA aesthetic relates to the built environment. It entirely overlooks the alternative aesthetic of the natural environment. "

"At present the majestic landscape stretching to the Brindabellas provides a vista from the bridge, or better still, for viewers from Commonwealth Gardens over the lake. "

In a second letter to the *Canberra Times* on 28 March, Professor Mulvaney discussed the proposed Immigration Bridge in this precinct:

"The Immigration Bridge has been omitted from consideration in Draft Amendment 53. As it represents a significant factor in transport arrangements and must occupy some of the vaunted open space claimed by NCA, its omission suggests another example of divide and rule processes at work. What impact will this 12 metre plus structure have upon the general vista? Necessary lift structures for those unable to climb

many stairs may bulk the structure at Flynn Drive. It simply is unacceptable procedure to consider the future Albert Hall Precinct without taking this structure into account. Further, the already cramped nature of the museum site may suffer further from the bridge's impact and from access pathways, not to mention its aesthetic appearance."

A 'Friends of the Albert Hall' group has been established and is collecting signatures for a petition opposing the NCA plans for the precinct. (Contact Lenore at coltheart@netspeed.com.au)

Draft Amendment 53 can be viewed on the NCA website at www.nationalcapital.gov.au and going to Planning and Urban Design from where a 6.3MB pdf file and also a comment form can be downloaded. Copies are available from Regatta Point, and the NCA offices. The time for submissions has been extended from April 13 to May 4.

Luke Wensing, Treasurer WBSG Canberra Chapter

LETTER TO THE CANBERRA TIMES

Like Professor Mulvaney and many others, I was shocked by the decision of the Minister for the ACT to ride roughshod over the recommendation of the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories that the "Griffin Legacy" Amendments proposed by the National Capital Authority (NCA) be disallowed (CT, 25 March 2007). Even the ACT Government, in the shape of Minister for Planning, Simon Corbell, has let down the people of Canberra by accepting the ill-conceived Amendments to the National Capital Plan despite the high-handed Ministerial action (CT 23 March 2007). I was an observer at the roundtable public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee into the four Amendments proposed by the NCA on 23 February and was inspired by the considered views and vision of the acknowledged experts in the field such as Professor James Weirick, Dr Romaldo Giurgola, Enrico Taglietti, Robert Thorne, Professor Ken Taylor and Keith Storey, who, in defence of the name and vision of Walter Burley Griffin and

his wife Marion, urged the Committee to disallow the Amendments. I was also impressed by the excellent and sensitive chairing by Senator Lightfoot, which allowed the views of these authorities to be fully explored. In these respects the roundtable hearings may well prove to have been Canberra's finest hour.

All this dedicated work has now been trampled underfoot. When the people of Canberra wake up in the years to come to an unfamiliar, cluttered and traffic-choked city, it will be too late. Only then will they realise the full measure of their betrayal.

Dr Ann Kent

EARLY GARDEN SUBURBS ADDED TO THE REGISTER OF HERITAGE VICTORIA

The first of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin's "garden suburbs" have been added to the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR nos. H2103 & H2104). Mount Eagle and Glenard Estates, both in Eaglemont and now in the Municipality of Banyule, have been acknowledged for their historical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria.

Developed in 1914 and 1915 they predate Castlecrag in Sydney and the Ranelagh Estate in Mount Eliza by some ten years and are recognised to be relatively intact today. They are smaller in area than these latter two estates but similarly are characterised by "distinctive long roads following the contours of the site, providing views from each allotment and its design responding to the natural beauty of the area". Congratulations to the devoted residents of these Estates who have followed this nomination through. The Mount Eagle Estate also is linked to the "Heidelberg School" of Australian impressionist painting where Streeton, Roberts, Conder and McCubbin painted many significant works during the early twentieth century.

Dr Meg Breidahl

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



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Date: _____

Amount enclosed: _____

Please make cheques payable to:
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post to
The Treasurer c/- 12 The Parapet, Castlecrag, 2068

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.

Adult	\$ 25pa
Child (under 16 years)	\$ 5pa
Student	\$ 5pa
Household (2 adults + up to 2 children)	\$ 40pa
Community organisations	\$ 40pa
Business organisations	\$ 50pa
Overseas members add \$10 to the fees listed above.	