

News Update

October 1999

Griffin Exhibition in Melbourne

This exhibition opened at the RMIT Gallery at RMIT's city campus 344 Swanston Street, Melbourne on 11 October and will run until 13 November '99.

The exhibition is titled *Architectural Works of Marion Mahony Griffin and Walter Burley Griffin in Melbourne featuring the Capitol Theatre and Newman College* and includes architectural drawings, plans and models, interior detailing, furniture and photographs of these buildings and also of Café Australia. Gallery opening hours are Monday to Friday 11.00 to 5.00pm and Saturday 2.00 to 5.00pm. Free admission.

Stella James House talk - 24 October

The eleventh Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Sunday 24 October 1999 at 2.00pm at the National Trust's Stella James House, 32 Plateau Road, Avalon, Sydney.

Following at 2.45pm guest speaker Ian Stephenson, Senior Curator of the National Trust will talk about the Stella James House. In the recently published book titled *Avalon Landscape and Harmony: Walter Burley Griffin, Alexander Stewart Jolly & Harry Ruskin Rowe* edited by Jan Roberts, Ian Stephenson wrote a fascinating chapter titled *In joy and affection Walter Burley Griffin and the Stella James House*. Jan Roberts will be our special guest at the meeting and we hope that she will bring some of her books to sell on the day.

Following the talk and an inspection of the Griffin house you are also invited to inspect the gardens and exterior of an Alexander Stewart Jolly house at Whale Beach.

Please bring a cushion or a chair.

For further information contact Kerry McKillop on 9958 4516 or Adrienne Kabos on 9958 2060.

Re-launch, re-light the Capitol

The RMIT purchased the Capitol Theatre last May, rescuing it from an uncertain future. The theatre will provide an auditorium for lectures and presentations and be available for events such as the Melbourne International Film, Fashion and Comedy Festivals as well as for community and heritage groups.

At the opening of the theatre in 1924 Marion Mahony Griffin said she envisaged it as "the cultural heart of Melbourne" and RMIT's long term plans are "to re-establish the theatre as a significant site on the cultural map of Melbourne". Works will include re-opening and renovation of the upper lounge and foyer, re-installing the stairs and restoring the ceiling and balcony above the main foyer.

On 7 November the RMIT with 650 guests will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Capitol Theatre with an evening of live entertainment, film and external facade light show. Tours are also available. For further information contact Julie Nixon tel. 03 9925 1986 or e-mail robyn.oswald-jacobs@rmit.edu.au

The Griffin Federation Track

The Society has made a successful application for a \$29,000 grant for The Griffin Federation Track under the Federal Government's Federation Community Projects program. This walking track will link the Griffin Estates in Castlecrag with Northbridge and the Bicentennial Reserve in Willoughby. Professor Carrick Chambers and other Society members, in close association with Willoughby City Council, prepared the application. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$56,500, of which Council will contribute \$20,000, voluntary labour is estimated at \$6000 and the Society will contribute \$1500 for public relations and publicity.

The project objective is to restore elements of the original Griffin Estate landscape plan and establish a significant pedestrian linkage with neighbouring suburbs and the Bicentennial Reserve in Willoughby, where the Griffin-designed incinerator is located. At the Bicentennial Reserve, The Griffin Federation Track will link with other bushland and urban walks. The track will commemorate the Griffins, whose planning for Canberra was a major element of the Federation story.

In its application, the Society argued that Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin are significant figures in the events and ideas of Australian Federation. The Federal Capital was conceived to symbolise Australia's newly acquired status to the world. In announcing an international competition, the new nation showed its confidence and willingness to seek the best of urban planning from the world stage. In selecting the entry of the Griffins, the judges chose an innovative and inspirational design that represented the cutting edge of urban planning. They also made an important step toward building the linkages between the new democracies of Australia and the United States of America which have become increasingly important to our modern nation.

Walter Burley Griffin wanted a democratic city inspired by the new Federation. He conceived a city that expressed the Australian character. The great triangle had its civic activities at the base. Across the triangle Griffin planned a park as a democratic space, in which the main national institutions were to be located. Moreover, the "bush capital" related to the Australian landscape: its great axes lining the city up with the natural bush beyond.

The basis for Griffin's Canberra was powerful and beautiful, but sadly never properly realised. However, from the Canberra experience, the Griffins developed a deep appreciation and love of the Australian landscape and its vegetation. They were to go on to develop and demonstrate their ideas for a democratic urban community in harmony with the Australian landscape at Castlecrag on Sydney's Middle Harbour. The Griffin Estates are now recognised as probably one of the major achievements of two of the most prominent architects of the 20th century: architects who came to Australia and adapted to its natural environment as a direct consequence of Federation.

It is therefore fitting that the Centenary of Federation should be marked by a project to help more Australians gain an appreciation of the vision and design concepts of the couple who came with the intention of expressing the ideals of the union through our National Capital. Instead, they were able to both create and realise many of those ideals through what is now an internationally recognised piece of outstanding urban design on the foreshores of Sydney's Middle Harbour.

The Griffin Federation Track is devoted to the advancement of that vision. It is proposed to restore a section of the Griffins' original open space plan to provide a user-friendly/functional pedestrian linkage between the Castlecrag Estate and adjoining communities. The project will restore and complete the stone staircases and walkways that lead from the Griffin Estate at Turret and Keep Reserves towards The Outpost and the Sailors Bay Creek group of reserves, thus providing a direct link between Castlecrag and Northbridge. The project is scheduled for completion by 1 September 2001.

Bob McKillop

Ku-ring-gai Seminar overview

A stimulating evening held on 19th May at Ku-ring-gai Council Chambers was organised by the National Trust. There were three guest speakers:

Heritage consultant Penelope Pike put the history of Ku-ring-gai in context describing how the steep terrain precluded early development except for timber getting and some farming on the more gently sloping land to the east. The steep western slopes were heavily wooded and it is believed that what became the Pacific Highway along the ridge was originally an Aboriginal road.

The Strathfield to Hornsby railway line was put in the 1860s and the "highlands" of the North Shore such as Waitara and Wahroonga became a retreat for those who could afford to escape the crowded unhealthy city. During the press for Federation, Sir Henry Parkes, keen to win the votes of the North Shore, promised a railway line. It was constructed from Hornsby to St Leonards and then to Milsons Point in the 1890s. This opened the North Shore for development.

The new residences were often designed by innovative overseas architects or Australian architects who had graduated from Australia's first School of Architecture established in the 1880s at the University of Sydney. Both reacted against the decorative Victorian style and implemented innovative designs.

As a result Ku-ring-gai today is like an open air museum of Australian domestic architecture of 1890 onwards, including works by Walter Burley Griffin, William Hardy Wilson, Alexander Jolly, Leslie Wilkinson, John R. Brogan, Harry Seidler, Glenn Murcutt and Ken Woolley. Ms Pike stated that "it is the best collection of architect-designed Australian domestic buildings from the 1890s to the 1940s and beyond, with the architectural tradition continuing until the present day".

Stephen Davies, Deputy Executive Director of the National Trust and Councillor of Woollahra Municipal Council followed and discussed the "showcase of architectural style" in Kuring-gai where almost every house was individually designed

by an architect and where the garden setting and landscaping are often as significant as the houses themselves. Mr Davies showed slides of many such places including the Eric Pratten House in Telegraph Road Pymble, designed by Walter Burley Griffin, and mentioned the two other Griffin houses in Ku-ring-gai, the David Pratten House in Pymble and the Cameron House in Marian Street, Killara.

David Logan, of Godden Mackay Logan Heritage Consultants was the final speaker and outlined six important aspects of managing change in heritage areas and in relation to heritage items:

1. Heritage values change over time.

Community values in relation to heritage change over time. Council and the community must recognise this and protect heritage areas and items not just for the present but for the future as well. We should not jeopardise future opportunities to re-evaluate things that are not currently accepted as being of heritage value.

2. Before we can make good decisions about heritage buildings and areas we need to understand their particular heritage significance.

The first step in effectively managing heritage buildings and areas is to identify what is significant and to disseminate this information widely. It is important that the community is made aware of the existence of Heritage Assessments and historical information and that it is welcome and, indeed, encouraged to use these.

3. Conservation Areas and Special Character Areas are different.

In deciding whether an area should be listed as a Conservation Area or a Special Character Area, it is necessary to determine whether the individual buildings and other elements which contribute to the overall value of the area would need to be retained in order for these values to survive.

4. Heritage items and areas must be appropriately zoned.

If heritage buildings and areas are to be effectively managed, they need to be appropriately zoned. Conservation areas must be zoned in a manner that supports the achievement of the specific conservation policies and/or the desired future character for these areas. Similarly, height and FSR controls must also be compatible with the objectives for conservation areas and heritage items.

Mr Logan gave the example of the Griffin-designed Winter House at Telopea which had been proposed for medium density rezoning, thereby creating enormous pressure for subdivision.

5. Urban consolidation poses a real threat to conservation areas.

Planning objectives for denser forms of development are generally at odds with heritage objectives for conservation areas. Existing subdivision patterns, setback lines and the prevailing scale or form of

development may all be threatened.

6. Even with an appropriate planning framework in place, heritage controls will only succeed if they are appropriately administered.

Councils must have sufficient expertise to understand heritage values and to analyse the heritage impacts of development proposals. Provided there is an understanding of heritage values and sensitive design, good infill development can be achieved in conservation areas and adjacent to heritage items.

Powerhouse reception for local governments with Griffin heritage

On the evening of 20 April 1999 the Powerhouse Museum hosted a special reception at which Terence Measham, Director of the Museum, Councillor Graham Jahn, representing Sydney City Council and Adrienne Kabos, president of the Walter Burley Griffin Society were guest speakers. Published below with kind permission is Mr Measham's speech.

"In association with Sydney City Council I offer you a warm welcome to this special reception to celebrate the museum's exhibition, Beyond Architecture: Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in America, Australia and India as part of Heritage Week.

It all started with the demolition of the Pyrmont Incinerator in 1992 - which we videoed.

The exhibition does many things but in particular, it does draw attention to the significance and range of the Griffin heritage in Australia. Accordingly we have invited representatives from the ACT and from NSW local government councils privileged to have Griffin sites or structures in their shires.

The number of Griffin projects within these councils ranges from single dwellings - such as the Stella James House in Pittwater Shire and the Edward Winter House in Parramatta - to three private residences in Ku-ring-gai (the Eric and David Pratten Houses and the Cameron House) to over 30 houses and sites at Castlecrag in the shire of Willoughby. Willoughby also boasts a rare surviving Griffin-designed incinerator buildings and so does Leichhardt Council at Glebe. Griffith, Leeton, Port Stephens and, of course, Canberra owe their original town plans - at least in part - to the Griffins.

The most recent addition to the Griffin *oeuvre* was made last year with the attribution of the James Stuart tomb - magnificently sited at Waverley Cemetery - to a Walter Burley Griffin design of about 1915. Add to this list the geometrically decorated water towers at Leeton and you get some idea of the great flexibility of the Griffins' design aesthetic and the extraordinary diversity of their work during the two decades or so of their residence in Australia.

These sites and structures survive in varying states of preservation and originality; some are protected by heritage listings, many aren't. Best served are several of the Griffin-designed houses, restored and maintained by fastidious owners or heritage bodies such as the National Trust or Historic Houses Trust. Most in need of conservation consideration and protection planning perhaps are the public spaces - reserves, and foreshore zones - that were such an integral part of the Griffins' original planning vision.

But NSW and the ACT are only part of the story. Melbourne has major Griffin sites and structures within the city. The most important and well-known of these - the Capitol Theatre - was recently purchased by RMIT. This unprecedented initiative has effectively assured the theatre's future as both a viable public venue and a respected and cared-for heritage structure.

The acquisition of the Capitol Theatre is something of a Griffin heritage milestone but we hope it reflects a turning point in the recognition of the significance of the place of the Griffins in Australia's architectural history. Without doubt the appearance in recent years of several US and Australian publications on the Griffins and the museum's *Beyond Architecture* project have contributed to this reassessment of the Griffins.

Vital to this process, however, has been the unique contribution of the Walter Burley Griffin Society. Since its foundation in 1988 the society has energetically pursued a program of lectures, tours, open days and publications - interspersed with the occasional representation to local council! The recent formation of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America and a branch of the Society in Melbourne does great credit to the original society and is yet another manifestation of the widening national and international appreciation of the Griffin legacy.

Before introducing Graham Jahn I would like to thank the exhibition's advisory team, the Walter Burley Griffin Society and members of the 1992 Pymont Incinerator Working Party.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the City of Sydney, the exhibition's major sponsor for their invaluable cooperation and assistance throughout and for making tonight possible. And the exhibition's other sponsors HBO + EMTB Architecture and QANTAS.

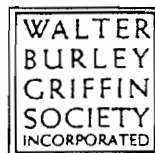
I also wish to acknowledge the support of Crone Associates, The E.G.O. Group, Multiplex, Peddle Thorp and Walker and the US - Australia Griffin Exchange Program.

Internally, as this is not an exhibition launch, I will restrict myself to one staff acknowledgment for her superb achievement, I thank our exhibition curator Anne Watson."

Newman College Furniture Restoration and Reproductions

Over the eighty two years since Newman College, University of Melbourne, was completed, many of its original pieces of furniture designed by Walter Burley Griffin had been lost, destroyed or simply thrown out. However, a few years ago a program of acquisition was initiated by the College's then librarian, Jane Carolan, who energetically reclaimed and assembled a considerable collection of the College's original furniture including 25 dining room chairs, several swivel chairs, eight student desks, 20 bookcases, and two chiffoniers. The quest for other pieces of furniture continues and the College is now embarking on a program of restoration. As reported in the "Old Collegian" newsletter, the College is encouraging donations to restore the furniture and would welcome information about other pieces of college furniture which may still be "at large". In addition the newsletter reports that "the Newman College Old Collegians Association proposes to commission the production of a limited number Griffin Dining Room chairs, the originals of which currently sell through antique dealers for over \$2,000 each. Five hundred chairs would be produced, numbered, and marketed for around \$1,000 each." If you are interested in acquiring one chair or a set of chairs contact Linton Lethlean tel. 03 9328 4133 or fax 03 9328 4834.

MEMBERSHIP FORM



MEMBERSHIP

Name: _____

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Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Please make cheque payable to
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post it to
The Treasurer at 7 Mackenzie Street, Lindfield NSW 2070.

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 below.

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