

News Update 37

September 2003

ARCHIVAL TREASURES ON UNITED NATIONS REGISTER

The exquisite 1912 plans and drawings for Canberra by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, held by the National Archives of Australia, have been included on the UNESCO Memory of the World Australian register.

At a ceremony at the National Library of Australia on 9 May, Barry Jones announced that the original plans and drawings for Canberra, together with a set of 17 landmark Australian constitutional documents, had been included on UNESCO's register of Australia's most important documents. Last year the Griffins' plans and drawings were displayed in the Archives exhibition *A Vision Splendid* of which Jay Arthur was the curator.

Newly-appointed National Archives Director-General, Ross Gibbs, said 'I am delighted that these significant documents held by the Archives are now included on UNESCO's Memory of the World national register.'

'The Griffins' plans for Australia's national capital are just as inspiring today as they were 91 years ago' he said, describing them as 'archival treasures'.

A rigorous selection process precedes inclusion on the Memory of the World register. This year's two inclusions bring to six the number of items on the Australian register. Also included are the Endeavour journal of Captain James Cook, the Eddie Mabo papers and the Cinesound Movietone newsreel collection.

The material can be viewed on the Archives

website at www.naa.gov.au. To view the Griffins' plans, click on Record Search, then Search as a guest, type Griffin in the Keywords search and type A710 in the Reference Number to retrieve a list of 14 digitised drawings.

For further information contact:
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GRIFFIN ARCHIVES: CATALOGUE ON CD OF GRIFFIN'S PROJECTS HELD AT BURNHAM AND RYERSON LIBRARIES, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

A collection of archival material sent to the Burnham Library by Professor James Weirick in 1970 has recently been given funding by the Mellon Foundation to be converted to CD-ROM/electronic format. The Burnham Library's collection of Aperture Cards, entitled 'Griffins in Australia Collection 1912-1964', mainly working drawings of the Castlecrag homes along with some other drawings of the other Sydney projects, can be found at weblink www.artic.edu/aic/libraries/rbarchives/griffin/griffinall.pdf

The bulk of the collection consists of Griffin working drawings which were located in various files at Willoughby City Council by Ian C. Griggs, an enthusiastic Building Inspector, some time around 1969-1970. Today, the original Willoughby plans, newspaper clippings and brochures are held in the Local History Section of the Willoughby City Library. They can be viewed at website www.libdex.com/data/34/17229html

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

In our last News Update, I mentioned that your committee is reviewing all of its activities and priorities so that we can not only continue our heritage preservation efforts, which are quite demanding, but also respond to ideas which came forward in the recent Members' Survey.

Here are some of the projects we are working on:

- Getting our website ready for a "soft launch" within the next few months and a full launch early next year.
- Preparing an inventory of the heritage status of all Griffin's NSW works so that we can keep better watch on their conservation. Later this will be rolled out nationally.
- Hosting two, possibly three, members' events in the next year; possibly one outside Sydney.

I would like sincerely to thank all of the members of the committee for their hard work in developing this programme.

Andrew Kirk

AMERICAN SOCIETY'S FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING

In early June my wife Sue and I travelled to Iowa, USA to attend the very well planned and highly successful Fourth Annual Meeting of the Walter Burley Society of America. One hundred and seventy people registered for the four-day programme entitled "The Griffins and the Prairie School in Mason City".

Mason City is the location of Griffin's community design for Rock Crest/Rock Glen of about 1912. As well as five large and interesting Griffin-designed houses, the town has domestic and commercial buildings by other Prairie School architects,



Rock Crest/Rock Glen model constructed by A.Chen, C.Gutzmer and C.Henry, 2002. Photo John Clouse.

including Frank Lloyd Wright.

Bob McCoy, owner of the Blythe house and board member of the American society, led a team which did a brilliant job in putting together a set of extremely interesting events, lasting from the Thursday evening until Sunday morning. It began with an exhibition featuring nine large architectural models (see photographs below) of some of Griffin's mid-west projects. These exquisite and highly detailed works had been made by twelve of Professor Paul Kruty's graduate students from the University of Illinois between 1992 and 2002. They were transported to Mason City where they are to remain on exhibition at the local art gallery for some months. The University of Illinois has just published a small book on the models and their subjects by Professor Kruty.



"Own House" model constructed by J.Alexander, 1992, one of twelve models currently exhibited in Mason City. Photo John Clouse

During the morning sessions delegates attended a series of absorbing presentations on how it came to be that a small mid-western town contains so many Prairie School buildings and the intriguing, occasionally stormy, relationships between the architects involved.

The development of Mason City was, of course, in full swing when WBG went to Canberra and events there were paramount in his unsuccessful efforts to keep his USA practice alive. As well, there were presentations on the restoration of local buildings by Wright and Drummond and I made a presentation on Castlecrag and the restoration of the Fishwick House.

We were all privileged to be given guided tours of nine local houses. Other tours covered Wright's City National Bank building and Park Inn Hotel

plus some 20 other historic buildings in the town. Events were capped off by a memorable conference dinner.

This meeting generated a wealth of excellent material and fascinating insights into Griffin's late American practice. Sue and I were also impressed at the very professional way the conference was put together - plenty of food for thought for our own society when planning future AGMs! As a follow-up, we intend to produce a series of articles for our own newsletter about Griffin's role in Mason City and his legacy there, which we plan to publish in forthcoming newsletters.

Andrew Kirk

CONGRATULATIONS TO CENTENARIAN, MRS CISSY GODFREY

Birthday wishes and congratulations to Mrs Godfrey who had her 100th birthday in June. Mrs Godfrey and her husband Tom Godfrey were early tenants of GSDA No.1 Dwelling, Castlecrag in the 1930s.

During Historic Houses Trust's restoration of the Griffin-designed house ten years ago, Mrs Godfrey was most helpful in providing information about the house's history and details.

Today she still enjoys sharing her wonderful memories of Castlecrag and the Griffins, and recalls the music evenings she and her husband regularly hosted at their home on Monday evenings, which Marion and Walter attended along with many of the residents of Griffin homes.

MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN CITATION 2003 AWARDED TO LOUISE COX

The Marion Mahony Griffin Award acknowledges the significant and varied role women play in the profession of architecture. It differs from other RAI A awards in that it recognizes a distinctive body of work carried out over a period of at least five years.

This year the award went to Louise Cox. Louise's distinguished career is marked by achievement in three distinct areas of architectural endeavour: professional practice, contributions to the profession through active participation in the RAI A, the Board of Architects, and other state and national committees; and the advancement of architecture in the international arena. In all she has excelled.

Professional practice: Louise's career in

practice spans some 34 years during which time she developed skill and expertise in building procurement, documentation and coordination of the construction process. She is an avowed team player as well as a team leader, and acknowledges the pleasures and benefits of the mutual exchange of knowledge and skills. She thinks of herself as a strategic planner and builder. Her career in practice was primarily in the office of McConnel Smith and Johnson (1968-1997), where, from 1980 she was a director.

Contributions to the profession: Louise Cox has a remarkable record of service to the profession. She was the first woman to become National President of the RAI A (1994-1995), and the first woman NSW RAI A Chapter President (1988-1990). She has served on almost 30 state and national boards or committees in a range of professional areas. Through this work Louise has acted in the interests of the profession, and the public it serves. Most recently, through DOCOMOMO as well as the RAI A she has become involved in national heritage. In her own words she has sought to 'give back to the profession that nurtured her'.

International Work: Louise was elected as the Union of International Architects Councillor for Region IV (Asia and Oceania) in 1996, and since 1999 has taken a key role in the development of the UNESCO-UIA Charter for Architectural Education and the associated Education Policy Paper. The Charter addresses urbanization as one of the most pressing global issues, and challenges universities to educate students so that they can contribute to a socially and environmentally sustainable built environment. Since 2000 Louise has also contributed to the UNESCO-UIA Validation System, which together with the Education Policy was ratified at the 2002 XXII UIA Assembly in Berlin. In 2002 Louise was elected UIA Vice President for Region IV.

Louise has been indefatigable in her dedication to architecture and architectural education. She brings persistence, enthusiasm, vision, and not a little humour to her work. She will no doubt continue to forge new territory.

Associate Professor Anna Rubbo, Jury Chair

RECENT SOCIETY EVENTS

Heritage Week activities - *Griffin Walks and Water Glimpses*, the event the Society held on 13 April, attracted a large number of people to Castlecrag. Almost 300 went on guided walks exploring Griffin heritage and also early modern and contemporary

architecture, and an outdoor photographic display. Our thanks go to Professor James Weirick, Professor Carrick Chambers, Eric Sierens, Stephen Davies, Ben Gerstel, Anne Watson, Bob McKillop, John Kabos, Adrienne Kabos and Andrew Kirk for leading these walks. The National Trust, Historic Houses Trust, Willoughby Historical Society, Art Deco Society, DOCOMOMO, 20th Century Heritage Society, and the Nutcote Society provided heritage stalls. Willoughby City Council is to be thanked for the use of their community buses, and congratulated on the extensive musical performances in the Haven Amphitheatre as part of the *Streets to Creeks* project.

A guided walk a month later on Sunday 18 May was held for 40 plus people from the 20th Century Heritage Society of NSW, led by Adrienne Kabos.

At the Castlecrag Fair on June 1st the Society again conducted walking tours of Castlecrag, had a stall and sold many books and videos, with the raffle being won by Society member Dominique Brassier.

ESSENDON INCINERATOR

Society member Steven Barlow in Melbourne has sent us the following information about the Griffin-designed Essendon Incinerator, from articles in *The Moonee Valley Leader* and *Community News*.

He reports that restoration work has begun on the heritage-listed incinerator, the project having been made possible by a grant of \$775,000 from Moonee Valley Council and a \$90,000 Heritage Victoria grant. The consulting architect is Greg Burgess, who is well known for designing community centres.

The incinerator complex, set on the banks of the Maribyrnong River, will be preserved and converted to a community arts complex.

Built in 1930, it was one of twelve municipal incinerators designed in Australia to enable wet rubbish to be burned down to clinker ash suitable for road construction. It is the only surviving incinerator in Victoria and is believed to be Australia's most intact, still retaining its major working components, chimney and associated manifolds.

HHT ACQUIRES FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S 'WASMUTH FOLIO'

As reported in *Insites*, with generous donations, the Historic Houses Trust of NSW has acquired for its library a rare deluxe edition of this 1910 publication printed in Berlin on Japanese vellum and Japanese

tissue. Titled *Studies and executed buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright*, it includes 100 illustrative plates, more than half of which were drawn by Marion Mahony, of buildings and projects undertaken by Wright between 1893 and 1909. Marion joined Wright's Oak Park studio in 1895 and was a key figure in the practice up until 1909.

This copy is believed to be Wright's own proof set of the deluxe edition, and was given to Australian George Taylor publisher of *Building* magazine on a visit to Taliesen in 1915. Taylor (1872- 1928) published an illustrated essay of Wrights in 1914, and also championed the Griffins in their early years in Australia. At the time of Taylor's USA visit, Wright was bidding for the commission of Australia's new Parliament House.

CANBERRA FOLLOWING GRIFFIN

The book *Canberra following Griffin* by Paul Reid was launched in June 2002 at a function hosted by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. The Institute's National President, Graham Jahn, paid tribute to Reid, who died in 2001, and praised the initiative of the National Archives of Australia which published the book. He introduced the Walter Burley Griffin Society's vice president, Professor James Weirick, who spoke about the development of Canberra and the importance of the book. Below is an edited transcript of that speech.

"This is a very special occasion indeed. It is a celebration of an extraordinary work of scholarship and dedication, tinged with sadness as Paul is not here to see his book through to its final realisation. We are left with a beautiful book and a wonderful legacy to Paul's extraordinary commitment to Canberra and to the story of Griffin's involvement. It gives us another perspective on the design culture of Australia during the last one hundred years and on the making of our Federal Capital. Paul's understanding and insight add greatly to our knowledge and really draw out this amazing story.

Canberra following Griffin is the first design history of Canberra. Many people have written about its political history, social dynamics and interesting planning experiments but it's illuminating to see Canberra's development specifically from the design point of view. The book carefully explains the original intentions of the Griffins and describes the way in which their proposals were challenged, tested, refined and weakened. As Paul points out, the name Walter Burley Griffin is known to almost every Australian, but his significance has been very difficult to communicate. That's because his

is a complex and multi-faceted story and it's hard to understand exactly the way Griffin intended the city to be and how it became progressively so significantly altered. It is Paul's great achievement to lead us purposefully through the complicated twists and turns of the official records to see the way Griffin's intentions were deflected.

Paul's life in architecture as a practitioner, a scholar and as a great educator reflected his appreciation of the worth of the individual architect, the great legacies of modernism and the organic movement, and the lessons of politics. Above all, he had the humanity and grace needed to bring these forces together. What shaped this book was Paul's capacity to reflect upon what it is to be a designer, and how best to work with the great forces and processes that shape the modern city.

What Paul brought to this great challenge was the designer's way of thinking. He could think his way into the Griffins' minds and he also thought his way into the minds of the other designers who have shaped Canberra over time. His great contribution was to understand and explain the basis of the real struggle over the Canberra plan.

When Griffin arrived in Australia in 1913, he found that the Departmental Board, which had been formed to oversee the development of the winning design after the competition, had generated its own plans for the city. Of course, there was a huge dispute between Griffin and the officials over the plans to start the construction. They had reworked the Griffin plan, in fact amalgamating it with several other plans, including an Australian design which had been picked solely because it had a fully worked out sewerage scheme! The fusion of all of these ideas into a sort of hybrid was a dreadful example of colonial and bureaucratic thinking.

The bureaucrats charged with developing the city included Percy Thomas Owen, the Director General of Public Works, John Smith Murdoch, soon to become Chief Architect, and Charles Robert Scrivener, the Commonwealth Director of Surveys and the man who had recommended the site for Canberra. It was Paul's insight to realise that the bureaucrats had important reasons for acting in the way they did. It came down to a very simple choice: having selected the city's site, which was in the valley of the Molonglo River, was development to be on both sides of the river or on the south side only? This issue, which simmered away for years, was a most critical one.

From the official point of view, the south side was overwhelmingly the most sensible place.

There would be an easy connection by rail to Queanbeyan and then out to the main lines. There was shelter from the winter winds off the Alps. The elevated site, which admirably suited a prominent building, was nearby. To practical men, it made a great deal of sense for the city to be concentrated around what we know today as Manuka and Kingston.

Griffin, however, had totally different ideas. Because of the symbolic importance of a capital city to a democratic nation, he thought it was absolutely essential to commence building on the northern side. The city's design was to embody for all Australians symbols of our constitution, our polity and of our nation.

Griffin, of course, organised his overall plan in relationship to the landscape but, within that, his great idea was that at its core would be a triangle. This would have its base on the north side of the lake, linking the retail centre of the city with its commercial centre. He imagined that its business district would grow along the northern shore of the lake down what is today Constitution Avenue. Across Constitution Avenue was to be the great Central Park of the capital, like those of the great American cities. The park would be a place for everybody to meet for recreation and enjoyment. Within it were to be the main cultural institutions of the nation. At the foot of what we now know as Anzac Parade, which leads up to the War Memorial, Griffin put the national stadium, opera, theatre, museums, zoological gardens and so forth. All the public cultural institutions were to be within a public park. So the base of Griffin's triangle was to be the great street of the city, the place of enterprise, public open spaces and cultural institutions. In short, the place of the people.

The institutions of government were to occupy the south side of the lake. Between the government and the people, Griffin located the judiciary. In fact, the High Court is one of the few buildings in Canberra which is in the right place!

Griffin planned Parliament not on Capital Hill but on an intermediate rise known as Camp Hill, still on the main axis of the triangle which points towards Mt. Ainslie. Its form was to represent the bicameral nature of our legislature and it was to be raised up on its natural rostrum.

In between the legislature and judiciary was to be the bureaucracy. All government departments were to be located in what Griffin called a "Court of Honour". He believed it needed people of honour to serve their nation and they would be

honoured to do so.

At the apex of the triangle there were to be three buildings, two of them quite small but very significant because of their prominent location. These were to be the official residences of the Prime Minister and of the Governor General. So, the apex of the triangle was to house the nation's executive. The third planned building was an amazing stepped pyramid which he saw as a place to honour the achievements of Australians. He called it the Capitol in the tradition of the Capitol in Rome. What a shame that this wonderful, simple, incredibly powerful idea was never executed.

Thus, Griffin's plan was essentially a diagram of parliamentary democracy which every citizen could interpret. As you moved around the city, you would understand your rights and responsibilities as a citizen and the rights, powers and responsibilities of the governmental institutions.

And then two things of course made it Australian. One, it was lined up on the bush. It had the great axis, the land axis terminating at Mt. Ainslie and the water access terminating at Black Mountain, which was a reminder as Griffin said in his original report, of the primeval condition of the continent. So from Griffin's point of view he was arguing for this idea and he was arguing against the practical requirements of building a City with all of the amazing costs involved. He proposed recycling plants within each catchment of the City, which was an amazingly advanced idea for what we would call today a standard building practice. The problem was that the only working example of such a package plant at that time had been developed in garden cities in Germany and so in the midst of the First World War, Griffin was arguing before the Public Works Committee the virtues of German technology in sewerage. He was surprised that no-one took him seriously. But, it also meant carrying the railway across to the north side and so on. All of these of course were vastly expensive operations and it was something which the departmental officers felt they could not advise their minister to do, particularly as they were arguing passionately to build Canberra on the south side of the lake.

Ultimately Griffin was forced into the position where he had to resign in 1920, after many years during the First World War without really being able to build very much at all on the ground. As it happened, Senator George Pearce, the then responsible minister who was tiring of this "battle between the plans" as he called it, had made an executive decision that the basic concepts in

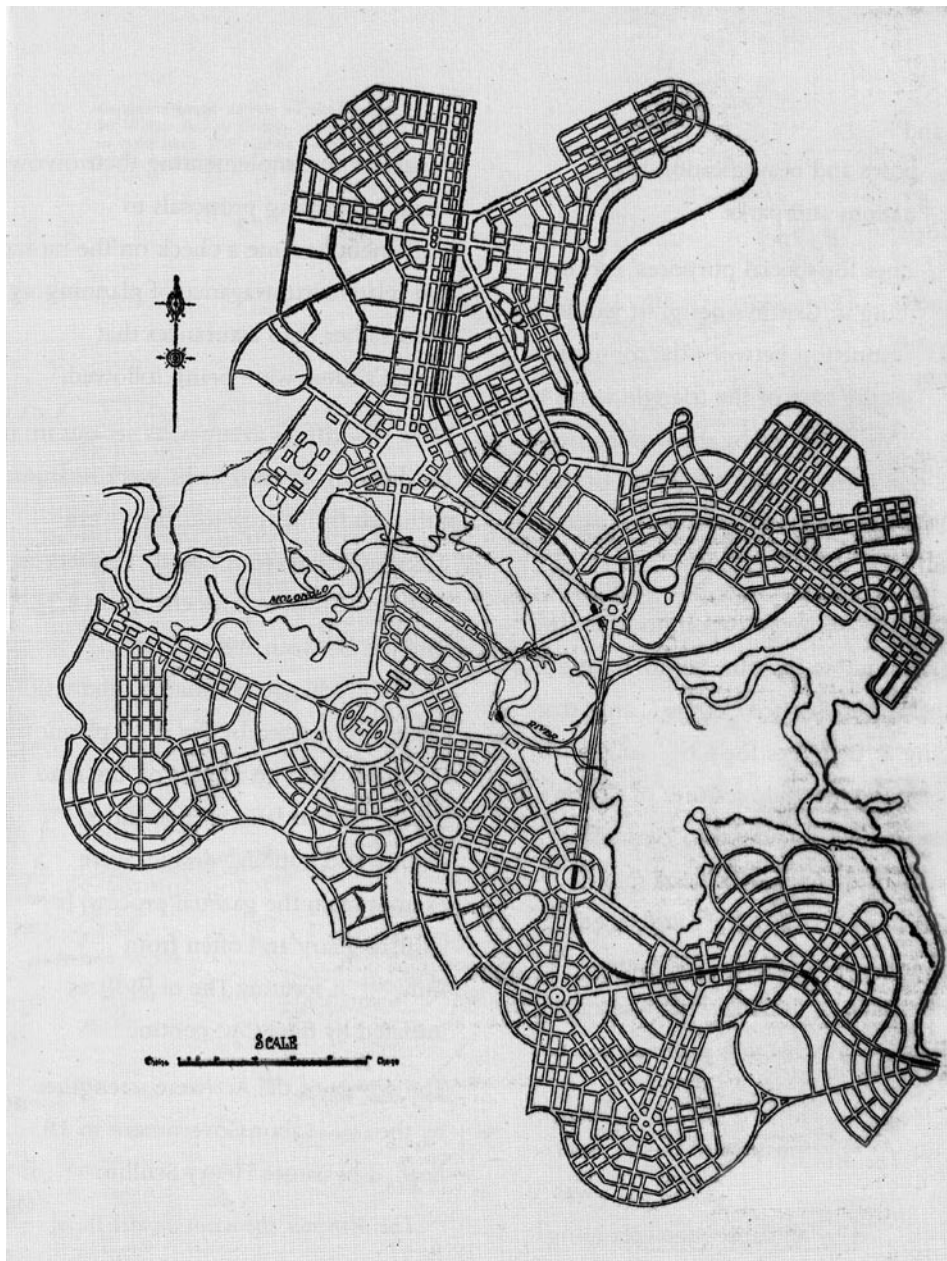
Griffin's plan were going to be followed. He tried to make this decision permanent by posting it in the Commonwealth Gazette in 1925 (see plan below), so that to change it would require an act of Parliament. As a result, Griffin's spidery network of roads largely got built immediately north and south of the proposed lake.

Very reluctantly, the departmental officers and their successors began to build the city on both sides of the Molonglo River, which was still a floodplain with wide, empty paddocks. When Malcolm Muggeridge came to Australia in the 1950s he commented that the citizens of London had the disadvantages of living in a city without a plan, but they should consider the alternative: living in a plan without a city! Ultimately, of course, the elements of the capital were rearranged and built. None of us has quite worked it out ever since. It all looks very important but we can't quite understand what it means.

It has been a great challenge to successive designers who became involved with the city to make sense of, and work with, the legacy of their predecessors. The difficulty of their task is compounded by changing architectural ideas. Again, Paul brilliantly describes such influences as the impact of 20th Century modernism upon the Griffin idealism and symbolism, the roots of the low key garden suburb city that got built in the 1920s, and then the impact of high modernism leading to the city that we know of: one of fast roads, dispersed suburbs and empty spaces with no symbolic power or vital centre. Knowing what to do with it all has been our profession's great challenge for the last fifty years.

The real test came when the National Capital Development Commission resolved to build the new Parliament House. A very courageous decision was made: to second one of the truly gifted Australian architects, Peter Muller. He brought a totally new way of thinking to the more measured official views of the commissioning architects of the NCDC. Muller dug into the Griffin plan and its fundamental values and innate power. In 1976, to honour Griffin's 100th anniversary, he gave a wonderful lecture which brought out these very qualities. I think that from this moment, Paul Reid saw the real nature of the challenge. All of the work to persuade the Government to put Parliament House on Capital Hill and the subsequent arrangement of major buildings within the landscape were revalidated in terms of Griffin's ideas.

It's that story that really lies at the heart of this



Plan of Canberra gazetted in 1925 that put Griffin's road plan into an Act of Parliament. *Canberra following Griffin*, page 179

book. It was the testing of a great idea in practice that provided the inspiration and the impetus for the research and scholarship that the book represents. It's the story of the power of Griffin's remarkable ideas, their rejection, rediscovery and remobilisation.

The future of the great city of Canberra will be formed from the debate between its residents who have come to love many of its qualities and the values of the rest of the nation's citizens. It is in that debate that Griffin's ideas will be carried forward. Paul's book lays a very strong foundation for greater understanding. It is with great pleasure indeed that I have the honour to launch this book."

The book *Canberra following Griffin: a design history of Australia's national capital* by Paul Reid, National Archives of Australia 2002, is available at bookshops or directly from the publisher through www.naa.gov.au

RECREATION, CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY: THE SECRET SUBURBAN SPACES OF WALTER BURLEY AND MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN

An article with this title has been written by David Nichols and Robert Freestone and is published in the current issue of 'Studies in Australian Garden History'. www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au

GRIFFIN MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

The fountain erected in Castlecrag as a memorial to Walter Burley Griffin in 1965 is planned to have a major refit of its hydraulic system. Willoughby City Council has prepared a heritage statement and sought conservation advice on the restoration of the fountain's water mechanism which has failed.

The fountain was first proposed by the Castlecrag Community Centre Committee to celebrate Willoughby Municipal Council's centenary nearly forty years ago. It was designed by renowned sculptor Bim Hilder, made of copper, and unveiled by the Mayor, Alderman McGinty on Centenary Day, 23 October 1965.

To significantly assist in funding the enterprise, the local community raised over four hundred pounds! Walter Burley Griffin Society member, Neville Milston has kindly given the Society his receipt book from that time when he helped to raise funds for the fountain. He has also donated a newspaper cutting from 1965 that describes the proposal.

In the article the president of the Community Centre, Hugh MacCallum is stated as saying "it was felt that Griffin, who had given so much to Australia and Willoughby municipality through his outstanding architectural gifts, should be remembered for all time.

"The memorial would be a constant reminder to the citizens of the importance of planning and design.

"Several supporters of the project said that Griffin had set an example to the whole of Australia by planning a suburb in a beautiful bushland setting."

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE HAVEN AMPHITHEATRE

There are three exciting events at the Griffins' Haven Amphitheatre in Castlecrag during the Spring Music Festival:

• **BENJAMIN'S BIG BAND IN CABARET** Saturday 20 September 8pm

A night of dance music under the stars with Benjamin's Big Band, a 30 piece jazz orchestra. This high-energy performance group, featuring

vocalist Shalom Andrews, has that irrepressible big band sound and will play through the contemporary jazz, funk, Latin, and fusion music spectrum. The Haven stage becomes a dance floor for those so inclined to party the night away.

Refreshments will be available. Tickets \$15.00. For more information on the band: <http://www.benjaminsbigband.com/>

• **THE KOOKABURRA WHO STOLE THE MOON** Saturday 27 September 1.30pm & 3.30pm

Rem Theatre's *Kookaburra* has performed to sellout houses nationally and internationally. The Haven Amphitheatre is the perfect venue for this musical bush story. Bring the grandparents, toddlers & everyone in between to experience this original score especially commissioned to introduce children to the instruments of the orchestra in an engaging way.

Traditional clapsticks, didgeridoo and aboriginal dance forms combine with the music of the classical ensemble to present the unique characteristics of Australian animals. The Indigenous dancer illustrates the music of the Kookaburra, Snake, Frog, Emu, Wombat and Kangaroo in this delightful bush story, with members of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

• **UNDER MULGAWOOD (World Premiere)** Friday October 31, Saturday November 1 & Sunday November 2 8pm

A play for voices written by Will Christie based on the renowned *Under Milkwood* by Dylan Thomas. Witness the birth of the Aussie version in its first-ever performance.

The Haven Shuttle bus operates to and from all performances, commencing from Castlecrag shops 1 hour before the event. For further information, ring the Haven Hotline—9405 5078 or Howard Rubie 0418 648 870



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