

## News Update

September 2002

### **A Vision Splendid exhibition extended by popular demand**

This superb exhibition at the National Archives of Australia, Canberra will be open for an extra four weeks until Sunday 29 September 2002. The enclosed journal "Memento", complimentary from the Archives for all of the Society's members, briefly describes the wonderful content of the exhibition.

### **Book discount for members**

Also enclosed with this newsletter is a flier for *Canberra following Griffin: A Design History of Australia's National Capital* by the late Paul Reid. This 400-page hardback book is lavishly illustrated and normally retails for \$90. The National Archives of Australia is extending its special pre-publication offer of \$75 to members of the Walter Burley Griffin Society who place an order on the enclosed flier.

### **Canberra, Tokyo, Beijing: the Griffins and Chicago architecture in the 'Far East', 1911-1921**

Monday 23 September 2002, 6.00pm - Talk by James Weirick, Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of New South Wales at 'Tusculum', RAI (NSW Chapter), Potts Point, Sydney.

The visionary architecture of the Griffins' Canberra Plan - although never realised in the Molonglo Valley - resonates with other works by progressive Chicago architects in the 'Far East' in the decade after 1911 - Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, and the Peking Union Medical College designed for the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation by Shattuck & Hussey. These works explored similar issues of human-scaled monumentality, rational organisation, timeless symbolism, integration with landscape and establishment of a powerful urban presence, in a manner both 'modern' and mysterious. Bookings essential: 9356 2955.

### **Castlecrag Griffin Reserves Walk**

Sunday 22 September 10am-1pm or 2pm-5pm. Organised by Willoughby City Council these discovery walks will reveal how the reserves are being transformed back into bushland. Involves rough bush tracks with steep steps. Sturdy shoes and water required. Bookings: contact Di Eva, Willoughby City Council on 9777 7755. Meeting location advised upon booking.

### **Griffin Society receives heritage grant**

The Walter Burley Griffin Society has received a \$ for \$ grant of \$2,450 from the NSW Heritage Office's Heritage Incentives Program to fund an educational brochure titled *The Griffins' vision: Castlecrag's heritage*.

The brochure will be aimed to assist in conserving and reinstating the unique and nationally significant heritage created by the Griffins at Castlecrag by informing new residents about the area's history and the benefits of conserving its heritage, so as to avoid unsympathetic development proposals.

### **Willoughby City Council receives grant for heritage study of Eric Nicholls' work**

Willoughby City Council has also received a \$ for \$ grant of \$10,000 from the NSW Heritage Office's Heritage Incentives Program to undertake a heritage study of Eric Nicholls' work in Willoughby City. The Council is to be congratulated, and has already embarked on the project which will be completed in 2004.

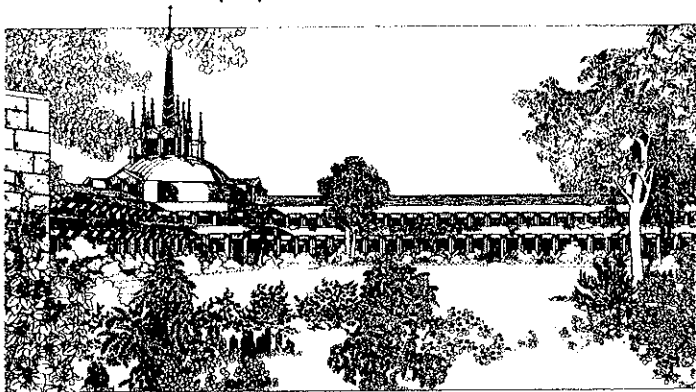
### **Siting of development proposal threatens Newman College**

Newman College and its immediate neighbour St Mary's College at the University of Melbourne have submitted a development application for an Academic Centre prepared by distinguished firms

of architects Edmond and Corrigan Pty Ltd and Paterson and Pettus Pty Ltd.

Newman College was designed by Walter Burley Griffin and A.A. Fritsch in 1915, and as noted in the submission's Heritage Impact Statement (HIS), it is "recognised as being of state and national significance." A distinguishing characteristic of Griffin's original plan was its site design and relationship to the University as a whole - in particular, the relationship of the open corner of the courtyard subtly elevated to provide views across the cricket ground to the main section of the campus.

It is in this open corner of the courtyard that the 4 1/2 storey freestanding sculptural Academic Centre is proposed. Despite its inventiveness, the proposal imposes on the vistas from the Griffin section of Newman College, in particular the vistas from the cloisters, upper terraces and courtyard adjoining the principal element of the Griffin scheme, the Dining Room. The proposal also affects the scale



Detail from perspective view of Newman College courtyard, 1915. Drawn by Marion Mahony Griffin. Reproduced from David Van Zanten, *Walter Burley Griffin Selected Designs*, Prairie School Press, Illinois, 1970.

### **Griffin-inspired Roman Cypress trees burnt last December to be replanted on western side of Lake Burley Griffin**

The National Capital Authority has stated that the hundreds of historic Roman Cypress trees, destroyed in Canberra's devastating 2001 Christmas bushfires will be replaced with the same species. The plantation of more than 1000 trees, on Roman Cypress Hill between Lake Burley Griffin and the Tuggeranong Parkway, was all but wiped out in the devastating fires.

The trees, planted by Charles Weston in 1918 under the instruction of Canberra's designer, Walter Burley Griffin, didn't stand a chance when flames tore through hundreds of hectares of forests on Christmas Eve last year.

Director of the National Capital Authority's estate unit, Mr Andrew Baird, said it was hoped to use seed from the small number of trees which survived the fire in the replanting program. "A local nursery will undertake the seed collection and propagation and we would expect the plants should be ready for planting out at two-years-old in autumn 2004," Mr Baird said.

relationship of the chapel to its setting.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society has written to Heritage Victoria objecting to the proposed Academic Centre, as currently sited, requesting that alternative locations adjoining St Mary's College be considered, and that no development proposal be approved until a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is prepared.

The Society has pointed out that an opportunity exists to give the St Mary's College section of the site the architectural and urban significance that it lost when the full Griffin plan did not proceed. By locating a new work at the St Mary's end of the site, the compromising mistakes of the past could be redeemed rather than compounded.

At a meeting at Heritage Victoria, Melbourne on 14 June, the Society's Vice President Professor James Weirick also highlighted concerns about the Master Plan and the heritage impact of the overall expansion indicated in it, and its lack of conservation detail. He emphasised the need for a CMP to be prepared by an independent consultant with an appropriately qualified steering committee. The CMP should consider the grounds of the two colleges not just the designated curtilage of Newman College as the HIS does. After the CMP is prepared, the Master Plan needs to be redone in consideration of the constraints established.

The Society believes there is an opportunity for a significant building and an academic threshold for the two Colleges on the south west corner of the combined sites, but that it is essential that a CMP is prepared to establish sympathetic parameters for the very significant and highly revered Newman College.

### **After the fires**

The Journal of the ACT National Trust *Heritage in Trust* has published an article by Dr Robert Boden on the Roman Cypress Hill and another two Griffin plantings burnt in the December fires. "... the future of Cypress Hill between Lady Denman Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway is assured. The National Capital Authority which is responsible for these trees as they are on National Land, has decided to replant with Roman Cypress trees and to provide appropriate interpretation for visitors. The Authority has also decided to nominate the site for inclusion on the Register of the National Estate.

Some people, including me, believed this planting had been so compromised by the construction of the Tuggeranong Parkway which destroyed almost half of the number of trees, that replanting with fire-tolerant eucalypts would be preferable...

It is suggested that the Heritage Committee of the Trust continues to monitor the site and comments on the draft citation for heritage listing when it is available for public comment.

"Fortunately, only a small number of Californian

Redwood trees, *Sequoia sempervirens*, were burnt in the fire in the heritage-listed Redwood Plantation in early December. This species is one of very few conifers which have the capacity to re-shoot after burning, another is Canary Island pine, *Pinus canariensis*.

There was no local experience to see how Californian redwood would perform in Canberra after fire and Canberra Urban Parks and Places which manages the plantation decided to retain the trees to see how they would respond. This disappointed some of the local wood turners but was the wise decision.

Canberra lacks the ameliorating effects of the sea mists which roll in each afternoon where Californian Redwood occurs naturally. Although the 2001-2002 summer was extremely dry the Californian redwoods responded as they have been genetically programmed to do for millenia. By mid summer most of the burnt trees were carrying a soft green fuzz along almost the full height of the main trunk.

Masses of coppice shoots had developed forming bright green crinolines around the bases of the trees. The story of the 2001 bushfire and how the trees recovered will add to the fascinating history of this heritage planting.

The Bottlebrush, *Callistemon* species, plantings on the eastern side of Red Hill near the restaurant were also severely burnt in the late December bushfire. Green shoots have emerged from the bases of many of these shrubs and it appears they will recover. The frequency of fires on Red Hill since the Bottlebrush were planted in 1917 suggests that this may not be the first time the shrubs have been burnt and recovered.

The Cypress Hill, Redwood Plantation and Bottlebrush planting were all designed by Walter Burley Griffin and established by Thomas Charles Weston. The December fires suggested an 'annus horribilis' for these heritage plantings. It is pleasing to see that a combination of nature, Canberra Urban Parks and Places and the National Capital Authority has avoided this."

### **No fences, no boundaries**

In a much-quoted statement, Walter Burley Griffin declared:

*I want Castlecrag to be built so that each individual can feel that the whole landscape is his. No fences, no boundaries, no red roofs to spoil the Australian landscape: these are some of the features that will distinguish Castlecrag.*

In recent decades this shared landscape uninterrupted by fences has in some parts of the Griffin Conservation Area been marred by a proliferation of unsympathetic fences including some high timber paling, brush, and metal fences.

Commissioner Nott in a Land and Environment

Court case about an illegal fence in the Griffin Conservation Area late last year stated that Willoughby City Council should not only retain the Griffins' design intention at Castlecrag but should move to reinstate it. On a site inspection during the court case, Commissioner Nott saw for himself the Griffin legacy of shared landscapes and beautiful vistas that a lack of fences makes possible in the Griffin Conservation Area at Castlecrag. He also saw the unsympathetic alienating fences, many complete with graffiti, that prompted his belief in the value of recovering "the Griffin vision".

Encouraged by the Commissioner's words, the reinstatement of "the Griffin vision" has begun already. The applicant for a DA for a property in The Rampart with an existing unsympathetic fence adjoining the walkway will be replacing this fence with a more appropriate childproof weldmesh fence. This will greatly assist in reducing the alley-like appearance that the existing fence and some other fences have created in this part of the walkway. The applicant, Willoughby City Council officers and Councillors are to be congratulated on this excellent outcome. The Walter Burley Griffin Society hopes that this will be the first of many such instances, and that with time all the unsympathetic fences will be removed.

In the nationally and internationally significant Griffin Conservation Area, the ideal is for no fences in order to conserve Griffin's most important objective at Castlecrag of making the built form subordinate to the landscape. Conditions to curb the excesses of the past and gradually enhance amenity are not uncommon in other council areas. For example, in the Paddington Conservation Area, Woollahra Council requires some owners lodging DAs for extensions to remove an unsympathetic closed-in verandah or restore their terrace house's facade.

### **Revised plans for Glebe Incinerator**

Glebe Incinerator was designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Eric Milton Nicholls in 1932. It operated until 1949 and in 1952 its furnace and flue were demolished. Never the less it has operated continuously as the Council's Glebe Depot right up until the present. In 1997 a Conservation Management Plan was prepared which identified that the depot "contains rare surviving evidence of architectural composition, forms and details" including rare stippled paint work and that "the Glebe sheds are the only buildings of their kind."

Australand Holdings Limited's development proposal, lodged early this year, for 133 apartments beside Glebe Incinerator and its colonnaded sheds is undergoing revisions and will shortly be resubmitted to Leichhardt Council. The development of this foreshore site provides an exciting opportunity worthy of an outstanding design in terms of heritage

conservation and community value. However the first development application (DA) lodged by Australand earlier this year fell far short of what is worthy of this unique heritage foreshore site.

The ensemble of the three heritage buildings (the incinerator and two colonnaded sheds) and their plaza precinct needs to be sympathetically restored and reconstructed, and the local community should be consulted to find appropriate uses for all three buildings. However the first DA proposed to merely 'make good' the incinerator without conservation or reconstruction work, to reduce the colonnaded sheds to mere timber pergolas, and to schedule these works after the construction of all the apartments. In its six page response to this DA, the Walter Burley Griffin Society indicated this was unacceptable and drew Leichhardt Council's attention to the very commendable resolution it had passed on 28 November 2000 that appropriately requires the full restoration of Glebe Incinerator and sheds prior to any development of the former John Fletcher site.

Since May, Australand has been working on revisions to their proposal which are anticipated will go on exhibition for public comment in September.

### **Stella James House, Avalon for lease**

Rent this Griffin house from the National Trust - [www.nationaltrust.com.au/stellajames.html](http://www.nationaltrust.com.au/stellajames.html)

### **Marion Mahony Griffin Award**

The Marion Mahony Griffin Award is awarded by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), and recognises the significant and varied role women play in the profession and art of architecture. This year's winner of the Marion Mahony Griffin Award is Dr Elizabeth Farrelly, a Sydney-based writer and professional critic who has contributed almost twenty years' architectural criticism to the *Architectural Review* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She writes about often controversial and complex issues, providing valuable insight, and engaging equally with the profession, the

public, politicians and bureaucrats. Elizabeth has also made valuable contributions through her political activities, teaching and speaking engagements.

### **John Horbury Hunt: Radical Architect exhibition, Museum of Sydney**

Hunt arrived in Sydney from America in 1863 aged 24 and soon became Sydney's celebrity architect designing some 80 to 100 of its finest buildings including 32 churches and cathedrals. The exhibition's curator, historian Joy Hughes has written a book (of the same title) with architecture academic and historian Peter Reynolds and academic Lesley Miur on Hunt's life and work, cost \$54.95. Exhibition on until 1 December 2002.

### **New books**

- *The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening*, by Wilhelm Miller (1869-1938) was first published in 1915 and was a profusely illustrated book that championed the "prairie style" of landscape gardening. The book has just been republished by the University of Massachusetts Press with an introduction by Christopher Vernon, senior lecturer at the University of Western Australia.

- *Wrightscapes: Frank Lloyd Wright's Landscape Design* by Charles E. Aguar and Berdeana Aguar is one of the first books on Wright to acknowledge Walter Burley Griffin in a meaningful way. It reproduces Griffin's landscape plans for the Ward W. Willits House, Highland Park, Chicago of 1902 and the Little House, Peoria, Illinois of 1903 as well as examines the many landscape designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, and includes some 200 photos.

- *Prairie style : house and gardens by Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School* by Dixie Legler, Christian Korab. Published by Stewart, Tabori & Chang, New York, 1999. The book has fine colour photos of a number of Griffin house exteriors and interiors, with the Melson House on the back cover.

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

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## MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

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

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

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

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

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque payable to  
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post it to  
The Treasurer at 15 The Citadel, Castlecrag, NSW 2068.



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## MEMBERSHIP

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. was established in 1988 and aims to create a greater awareness and appreciation of the Griffins' 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 opposite.

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