



News Update 43

August 2006

GRIFFIN WEBSITE GOES LIVE

www.griffinsociety.org

The Walter Burley Griffin Society website went live on 27 June 2006. It is a large site of 35 pages of educational material about the lives and works of Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin. The pages have been prepared on a voluntary basis by various members of the Society and with the assistance of a grant under the Federal Government's 'Sharing Australian Stories' Program which has enabled the Society to contract two web technicians, an editor and to purchase images.

The website covers the Griffins' extensive and diverse projects in Australia, the United States and India with webpages on their urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture and interior design written by a team of writers with expertise in the various fields. It also includes a chronology of their work, selected publications for further reading, films and videos, news and events, and a searchable photo gallery of nearly 300 images.

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NATIONAL LIBRARY BUYS MAJOR GRIFFIN ARCHIVE

The National Library of Australia recently announced that, after many years of negotiation, it has bought the Eric Milton Nicholls Collection of archival material created by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. This is a very significant acquisition, and the Library describes the collection as 'breathtaking'. The size, scope and diversity of the collection allow a rare insight into the creative processes of these two important architects.

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WILLOUGHBY CITY COUNCIL TO RESTORE INCINERATOR

We are delighted to report that Willoughby City Council has announced bold steps to restore the Griffin-designed Willoughby Incinerator in Bicentennial Reserve, and to return it to community use. It has made a successful application for a \$454,545 grant for conservation works under the Federal Government's National Heritage Initiative Grant Programme administered by the Department of Environment & Heritage.

The grant will contribute to the conservation of the chimney, together with work to rectify the drainage, structural weakness and rising damp problems identified by conservation architects Godden Mackay Logan during their recent Conservation Management Plan, commissioned by Council (see *News Update*, No. 41). The total cost of the restoration has been calculated at \$1.3 million, and Council has voted to fund the remaining \$848,455.

In announcing this commitment and Council's action to terminate the existing lease of the building, Mayor Pat Reilly expressed his pleasure that this significant heritage item will be returned to the community for its use and enjoyment. He stated: 'The restoration of the Willoughby Incinerator provides Willoughby City with a unique opportunity to create a public amenity that not only satisfies a demand in the community but provides an opportunity to make a significant heritage item accessible to all.'

The Incinerator is a local heritage item on Willoughby City Council's Local Environmental

Plan and is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. The early 20th century incinerator complex is an outstanding example of the work of Walter Burley Griffin and Eric Nicholls. At present, the Incinerator is very vulnerable; its physical condition is deteriorating, it has been untenanted since 2002, and it has been subject to vandalism and break-ins. The Society is hopeful that having the property back in active use will reverse this situation.

While the restoration is being carried out, Council officers will undertake further investigations into the future management of and possible uses for the building, and public meetings will be held to ensure community input as the work progresses. Ideas for future use being canvassed include a Council function space, a permanent heritage display area, spaces for artists, a café, or a sports-related medical facility associated with the nearby Leisure Centre.

The Society greatly appreciates the work of Councillors and Council staff who have worked so diligently over the past months to achieve this pleasing outcome, and their ongoing commitment to this exceptional heritage asset of Willoughby.

(with thanks to **Samantha Taranto**, Public Relations Officer, Willoughby City Council)

GLEBE INCINERATOR: AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF GLEBE'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

The conservation architect, Trevor Waters, presented a most engaging tour of the Walter Burley Griffin incinerator at Glebe, on Saturday 8 April. The tour was organised by the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc.

Trevor outlined the history of Walter Burley Griffin's work, the innovative nature of his buildings, and his ability to combine functionality with design excellence. In partnership with Eric Milton Nicholls, Griffin designed 13 municipal incinerators in Australia for the Reverberatory Incinerator and Engineering Co. Pty Ltd. Seven of these were in Sydney, and the only ones to survive are those at Willoughby and Glebe. Of the other six incinerators built elsewhere in Australia, five have survived.

In the 1930s incinerators were commissioned by local councils to manage the problem of garbage disposal. Shipping garbage out to sea had become too expensive and ineffective, as the tides returned all manner of undesirable material, and landfill had also become too expensive. Incinerators were seen

as a cheap and efficient method of disposing of garbage.

Griffin's incinerators were designed to blend in with the landscape and were normally built on a hill, so that gravity would feed the garbage into the burners and the residue out for disposal. The Glebe Incinerator is an exception. Originally the incinerator was to be located on the higher ground overlooking the Harold Park Trotting venue. However, objections from local landowners forced the relocation of the incinerator to an area looking out over Blackwattle Bay.

The Glebe Incinerator was opened in 1933, and ceased operation in the 1940s. The building then became part of the council depot and was adapted for use as storage space and amenities.

With council changes back and forth from the City of Sydney to Leichhardt, the original plans for the incinerator were lost, and indeed, it was assumed that the building itself had been demolished. However, due to the diligent research of Trevor Waters, the remains of the building were recognised as the incinerator designed by Griffin and Eric Nicholls, and a conservation study was carried out with a grant from the NSW Heritage Assistance Program. The preservation of the building is largely due to the efforts of Trevor Waters, the Walter Burley Griffin Society, and the Glebe Society Inc.

The colonnaded wooden sheds which were an integral part of Griffin's design were demolished recently. They were apparently regarded as an eyesore, rather than as a part of our industrial heritage. The two colonnades now in the park, between the incinerator and the water, represent the original sheds and in one colonnade some of the original concrete columns which supported the timber sheds, can still be seen.

The material used in the construction of the incinerators was concrete. Concrete is a cheap and easily moulded material, which Griffin treated with various additives, including oyster shells, to give the appearance of sandstone, including the glistening patina of sandstone. The moulding, particularly of the Pymont Incinerator, reflected the Rudolf Steiner concept of four ethers, with symbols for fire (circle), water (crescent), air (triangle), and earth (rectangle), and Trevor brought an example of one of the moulded concrete bricks to the tour. The surface did indeed look and feel like sandstone. The Pymont Incinerator had once stood across Blackwattle Bay looking towards the Glebe Incinerator. Sadly, the Pymont Incinerator was

demolished in 1992, to make way for apartments. The original huge sandstone wall remains, and several of the original moulded concrete bricks were saved.

Margaret Sheppard

The Glebe Society Bulletin 3/2006 April/May 2006



Glebe Incinerator, April 2006 after its recent restoration and reinterpretation work. Photographer Bob McKillop

GLEBE INCINERATOR CELEBRATORY PICNIC SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2006

The Walter Burley Griffin Society has joined with the Glebe Society to celebrate the restoration and reinterpretation of the Glebe Incinerator with a picnic at the beautiful precinct on the foreshore of Blackwattle Bay, Glebe. Everyone is welcome to come and bring a picnic.

At 11.30am Jannene Smith from Godden Mackay Logan, the heritage consultants who planned and coordinated the incinerator's restoration work will explain the work, and heritage architect Trevor Waters will talk about the incinerator's history and operation.

The talks will be followed by an inspection of the incinerator.

A FREE event. Hot coffee and muffins may be purchased. For more information phone David on 9552 4172 or check the Glebe Society's website at: www.glebesociety.org.au

RESTORATION OF THE GRIFFIN FOUNTAIN, CASTLECRAG

Willoughby City Council and the Castlecrag Progress Association are to be congratulated on the restoration of the Walter Burley Griffin Memorial Fountain, at the corner of Edinburgh Road and Sortie Port, Castlecrag. The fountain was constructed in 1965 through a community fund-raising effort to mark the Centenary of Willoughby Council, has been returned to operating condition following renovations. The water was switched on in July and is now burbling happily away, with the lights and sculpture weaving magic in the Castlecrag night.

The fountain, with its magnificent water sculpture by Bim Hilder, has been shut down for some years with a damaged water bowl and a seemingly unrepairable hydraulic system. The Castlecrag Progress Association lobbied Council for its repair and allocated \$8000 of its funds towards the project. In response, Council officers were able to repair the bowl, install a replacement pump and new lights, and refurbish the jets under its maintenance budget.

AMERICAN WEBSITE GOES LIVE www.wbgriffinsociety.org

The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America has developed a website which went live in April. It is a great resource with biographies of the Griffins written by Professor Paul Kruty, some beautiful photographs of Griffin work in the USA taken by Professor Mati Maldre, and news and events.

COOLEY HOUSE, USA RESTORATION PLANS

The Cooley House in northeastern Louisiana, designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1908 but only constructed in revised form in 1926, has seen a succession of owners over the past two decades and is up for sale again.

Described as one of Griffin's masterpieces and one of the most significant historic buildings in Louisiana, the local community is campaigning to purchase and restore the house and make it publicly accessible.

A foundation is being established by the community and will work with the local council, the Monroe City Council to purchase, restore and find appropriate uses for the magnificent large Prairie School house. Restoration of the house's roof and foundations will be prioritised.

GRIFFIN WEBSITE GOES LIVE

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The wonderful images on the website have been sourced from the Avery Library at Columbia University, New York; Block Museum of Art at the Northwestern University; and the New-York Historical Society; the National Library of Australia; the National Archives of Australia; The State Library of NSW; The State Library of South Australia; the archives of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc, and from professional and amateur photographers in Australia and the USA.

The searchable Photo Gallery has nearly 300 images including the magnificent Melson House in the USA, Marion Mahony's design for Henry Ford's house, some of their Melbourne work including Newman College, the stunning interiors of the Capitol Theatre and also Café Australia, some of their Sydney work including the two Pratten houses at Pymble, early photos of the Castlecrag houses, and ones taken by Max Dupain in 1965, plus some of the truly remarkable Indian work. In addition there are three short movies on the website, including one produced specially for it on the Griffin walkways and reserves at Castlecrag.

NATIONAL LIBRARY BUYS MAJOR GRIFFIN ARCHIVE

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This acquisition is a very significant event for architectural historians and the Society. The Nicholls Collection was the last major Griffin collection in private hands and its purchase means that, worldwide, the great majority of important Griffin-related cultural objects are now publicly accessible.

An unusually large, diverse collection

The Collection is highly unusual in its size, scope and complexity. It comprises over 2500 items, mostly in good physical condition. The variety is astonishing. The Griffins' drafting and architectural skills are well illustrated by sketches, presentation drawings, renderings and photographs of their works. Walter described himself as an 'architect and landscape architect' and the breadth of his interests is also illustrated in this collection; as well as many items relating to the design of Canberra there are plans of other towns, maps, landscape project material, horticultural drawings and even detailed planting schemes. Additionally, many books, letters, notes, essays, lecture texts and photographs allow more intimate glimpses of the Griffins' lives and philosophies.

Although the Griffins' Australian work is significantly represented, the collection also contains many items that relate to the huge variety of their overseas work the extent of which is not widely appreciated in Australia. Of the roughly 400 architectural projects attributed to the Griffin office, well over half were generated in Chicago before 1914 (the year Walter and Marion moved to Australia) or in India during the 16 months they worked there before Walter's death in February 1937.

For the past five years, the Walter Burley Griffin Society has campaigned for a coordinated effort among the major Australian national collecting institutions (the National Library, National Gallery, National Archives, Museum of Australia and National Capital Authority) to purchase the Nicholls Collection in its entirety. In September 2001 the Society called a meeting of the Directors of these institutions at University House, Canberra to ensure a shared understanding of the content and significance of the Nicholls collection and to develop a strategy and plan of action for public acquisition. With the exception of some items, which were sold through public auction, this has now been successfully achieved. Fortunately, a number of key items which went to auction were purchased by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW and the National Library of Australia. The Society greatly appreciates the commitment to the conservation of the Nicholls Collection by these institutions, and in particular, the continuing support of the National Librarian, Jan Fullerton, which now sees the bulk of the collection in public ownership and protected as part of the cultural heritage of Australia.

Launch of the Archive

The Nicholls Collection was bought from the family of Griffin's architectural practice partner Eric Milton Nicholls. Its purchase means that, after some 70 years of dispersal, almost all the objects collected by the Griffins are now in public ownership in Australia and the USA, with the Library's collection being the largest and most comprehensive. This is a very fortunate and pleasing outcome, given the many sets of hands through which a lot of the items passed during that time.

The Library introduced the collection in late June (2006) with a one-day public viewing. On show were many linked 'back of the envelope' concept sketches, annotated plan drawings, client correspondence and work-in-progress photographs. Margy Burn, the Library's Assistant Director General for Australian Collections and



Main dining hall with balcony and mural, Café Australia, Melbourne 1916–1919.
Eric Milton Nicholls Collection, PIC/9929/660, Album 1092/3, National Library of Australia.

Reader Services, believes that the items now held by Canberra-based institutions would collectively provide a wonderful core for a more public, possibly permanent exhibition of the Griffins' lives and works.

Two possible opportunities were raised and discussed at the launch. First, depending on the precise event chosen in setting the actual date, the centenary of Canberra will be celebrated quite soon, probably within six years. It has become pleasingly apparent that Griffin-events pull very large crowds in the national capital and no doubt their works and ideas will be centre stage during the centenary.

Second, in 2002 the NCA launched its 'Griffin Legacy' project to reassess the importance and relevance of the planning concepts and design philosophies of the Griffins for the future development of the national capital. One of the recommendations of the project team is to establish a 'Griffin Institute'. This will 'provide a permanent archive and exhibition of the Griffins' philosophies, beliefs and cultural values' and 'foster an understanding of the unique professional and artistic contributions of the Griffins'.

Summary Notes:

1. Items in the Nicholls Collection will progressively be available for viewing through the National Library of Australia's website: www.nla.gov.au
2. Information on the Griffins and Australian-based material can be sourced through the following websites:
 - National Archives of Australia: www.naa.gov.au
 - National Gallery of Australia: www.nga.gov.au
 - National Museum of Australia: www.nma.gov.au
 - National Capital Authority: www.nationalcapital.gov.au
 - Powerhouse Museum: www.powrhousemuseum.com.au
 - Walter Burley Griffin Society: www.griffinsociety.org
3. Information on publicly accessible USA-based material can be sourced through the following websites:
 - Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson & Burnham Libraries: www.ryerson.artic.edu
 - Columbia University, Avery Library: www.columbia.edu
 - New York Historical Society: www.nyhistory.org
 - Northwestern University, May & Leigh Block

Museum of Art:

www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu

- Walter Burley Griffin Society of America:
www.wbgriffinsociety.org

MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN AWARD

The award is presented annually by the Royal Australian Institute of Architecture (RAIA) to acknowledge a female architect for a distinctive body of architectural work and contribution to the profession of architecture. This year the award has been given to both Dr Anna Rubbo and Kim Crestani, who have 'contributed in distinct ways through the aligned fields of architectural education and practice. The common thread in both candidates was commitment to the social and cultural dimension of architectural practice; foregrounding the capacity of this profession to contribute to social justice and welfare.'

Anna is a former committee member of the Society, and wrote the page on Marion for our recently-completed website. Her research into Marion's life 'has helped to ensure Marion's more accurate recognition in Australia and the USA'. (from RAIA *Architecture Bulletin* July/August 2006)

FEDERAL GRANT FOR RESTORATION OF NEWMAN COLLEGE

Newman College will receive \$454,545 for conservation works from a grant awarded under the Australian Government's National Heritage Investment Initiative. The project includes urgent stone repair and replacement works.

Newman College is one of eighteen projects that have been awarded funding under the first round of the government's new heritage grants programme. Willoughby Incinerator was one of the other projects that received funding. The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, announced on 22 June that the projects would share \$3.6 million.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF NEWMAN COLLEGE: WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN'S DOME, 1915-18

Dr Jeff Turnbull lecture presentation, Annual General Meeting, Walter Burley Griffin Society, October 2005 continued from previous newsletter No.42.

GRIFFIN'S EDUCATION

At the University of Illinois, (UI) 1895-9, Griffin had learnt about the latest reinforced concrete technology, which he subsequently supplemented with knowledge of French systems. Professor Arthur Talbot in Engineering Hall at UI was a

world-renowned authority on reinforced concrete beam construction. The Professor of Architecture at UI, Nathan Clifford Ricker (1843-1922), designed and constructed the new university library, 1896-7, with floors and ceilings in reinforced concrete with stonework walls, a precedent for the College construction technique.



Newman College, University of Melbourne.
Photographer John Kabos, 1996

Griffin was also exposed to the compositional structures of *parti*, *dessin*, and architectonics. *Parti* was the pattern of functional distribution in a building design. *Dessin* was the perception of buildings as patterns of linear junctions between horizontal and vertical planes on a Cartesian grid. The grid module that Griffin employed at the college was 7ft. He also had a taste for architectonics, the aesthetic appreciation of the patterns of gravitational force acting within a building fabric. In contrast, Marion and Frank Lloyd Wright employed the method of Picturesque architectural composition favored by the Prairie School, where the building form was conceived as a series of perspective views.

Also in Griffin's thinking, university colleges, and also domes, were Types that were informed by the patterns of their precedents. A building type has geometric characteristics that distinguish each kind of building purpose according to the distribution of functions and the shapes that contain those

functions. Each building type tends to share a recognizable *parti*. Thus the perception of building types is analogous to the scientific classification of organisms into species according to their morphological or botanical patterns. Indeed Ricker stressed that buildings were like organisms.

GRIFFIN'S USE OF PRECEDENTS

Marion also claimed in "Magic" that she and Walter had different methods for making architecture. Frequently she remarked that she and Wright, for whom she had intermittently worked from 1895 to 1909, were in "the picture-making business", whereas Louis Sullivan and Walter engaged with "structure", she wrote. Thus her own work and that of Wright were in a flowing Picturesque mode, whereas Sullivan and Griffin emphasized the static patterns of building engineering.

However, both Sullivan and Griffin in their designs also included underlying geometric patterns that each selected from the compositional structures of a range of building precedents. Here "structure" can refer to the patterns of *partis*, types and architectonics. In "Magic" Marion observed that Griffin had memorized from his student days a vast array of botanical patterns that he could willingly recall. As with Newman College, Griffin's new architectural designs comprised the overlaying of remembered patterns from known architectural compositions. In Dr Turnbull's thesis the actual identification of precedents aimed to make the meaning of Griffin's architecture more accessible.

Unexpectedly the architectural patterns that Griffin selected and adapted for the design of Newman College were *partis*, types, and the architectonics most often found in the works of the following architects: Philibert de l'Orme (1510-1570), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) and Louis Henri Sullivan (1856-1924). The works of a small number of other architects such as George Robinson Dean (1864-1919), Otto Wagner (1841-1918), and Anatole de Baudot (1834-1915), also informed Griffin's choices of architectural patterns adapted for the Newman College Rotunda. Patterns from Oriental architecture also informed this design. These were the sources of patterns shown during Dr Turnbull's lecture. Surprisingly the works of Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) had no influence upon Griffin's College design.

Marion in "Magic" claimed that Walter was the "successor" to Louis Sullivan. In 1900, inside the 10th floor dining room of Adler & Sullivan's Auditorium Hotel, Chicago, Griffin heard Sullivan deliver his paper to the American Architecture

League's second convention, "The Young Man in Architecture". Sullivan insisted that the "elements of architecture" were the pier, the lintel, the arch and the dome. Griffin often told Marion that the lecture had changed his life. All four structural "elements" received strong due emphasis in the College design.

THE L-SHAPED BLOCK

In the *parti* pattern of the Newman College first scheme, August 1915, drawn by Marion Mahony, a striking resemblance is shown with that of Thomas Jefferson's first 1772 plan of his own house *Monticello*. The pattern of Jefferson's house Griffin overlaid with the pattern of the ninth century cloistered galleries of the Temple of Beng Mealea, Cambodia. A plan of this temple was illustrated in the 1910 edition of Fergusson's *History of Indian Architecture* (1842), with extensive additions on China, Japan, and South East Asia written by Richard Phene Spiers, who was a student friend of HH Richardson at the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts back in the 1860s.

In addition Christ Church Oxford is apparently another precedent for the L-shaped block constructed at Newman College, 1915-8. Christ Church, founded by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525, was the first university college in England. In an astonishing synchronicity, Griffin was an active member of Christ Church, Elmhurst, across the road from his parent's house. This Congregationalist church built a community hall during the first months of 1913 that was a recreational and meeting facility open to all creeds, religions, and racial and social groupings. Griffin served on the building committee for this hall before he visited Australia for the first time.

THE DOME TYPE AND ITS MEANING

Griffin was keen to achieve universality in his works. For example, Turnbull showed that patterns from both Oriental and Occidental sources were overlaid in the dome design. In his choice of precedents Griffin further desired to visibly link the College with the first places of scholarly learning in different parts of the world: the third century BC Buddhist Indian monastery, Sanchi, also monasteries in Buddhist/Hindu Cambodia; the L-shaped Christ Church, the first university college, in sixteenth century Oxford; Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia, 1817-29, the first university built in the new democratic republic.

"Magic" extols the virtues of Democracy and Equity. Large round tables were placed in the College's dining hall space so that staff and students could intermingle freely at will. All students were

issued with the same set of Griffin-designed furniture for their study/bedroom suites. Philibert de l'Orme's rustic dome building of 1567, and the natural phenomena of "exfoliation" inspired Griffin's play of smooth surfaces emerging out of roughly textured elements, evidently a metaphor for the emergence of democracy in the modern era.

GRIFFIN'S POSITION ON THEORY

No connection could be made between the College design and Theosophy. The Griffins were not Theosophists as often claimed, but Calvinist, in direct descent from the American Pilgrim Fathers. The American Calvinist church includes the Congregationalists (Trinitarians) (Walter), and the Unitarians (Marion). The latter were followers of Locke and rationalism until the advent of Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781. From the 1830s Americans such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau embraced Kant's "transcendental" concept. Indeed Transcendentalism was to transform Congregationalist and Unitarian theology. Intuition and naturalism gained the highest spiritual status.

Further, Griffin was a Platonist engaged with the concepts of Idea and Being, Unity and Variety,

One and the Many, and combined the patterns of the Orient and the Occident. Griffin quoted Emerson profusely when giving the 1915 Henry George Anniversary Lecture in Melbourne. In his *Representative Men* lectures during the 1850s Ralph Waldo Emerson advanced Plato's concept of Idea and Being. The concepts of Idea and Being Emerson translated as Unity and Variety, One and the Other, One and the Many. Unity was the philosophy of the Orient, wrote Emerson, and Variety was the Occidental contribution to Universality.

CONCLUSION

Griffin's works embodied multi-layered patterns. Ideas were brought into Being. Visions of modern democratic life were made manifest and real, of extraordinary beauty and power.

Dr Turnbull has also recently sent the Society a copy of another paper he has recently presented *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin: Concrete Applications* Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Construction History, Cambridge University, 2006. The paper covers Griffin's use of reinforced concrete construction technology in the central ribbed dome at Newman College. Dr Turnbull is willing to provide a copy of his paper; contact him at turnbull@unimelb.edu.au

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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



MEMBERSHIP

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

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.