

## News Update

November 2001

### ***New Eden* screening Sunday 25 November**

The ABC Gardening Australia program on Edna Walling and Walter Burley Griffin, *New Eden*, will be screened by the Society following its AGM at 2.30pm on Sunday 25 November. Following the 25minute screening, the Society is honoured that the Director of Historic Houses Trust, Mr Peter Watts will make a few informal comments. Venue: Castlecrag Community Centre, The Rampart, Castlecrag. Further information tel. 02 9958 4516.

### ***Commonwealth of Yarns* conference**

Two-day conference Fri 23 and Sat 24 November at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Friday's program includes Welcome by Dawn Casey, Director of National Museum of Australia, at 9.15am. Session 1: 9.30am - 11.00am - 'A Capital for a Continent' begins with James Weirick 'Walter Burley Griffin and the Australian Democratic Ideal', Pat Morrison 'Science Gets a Move On', and David Headon 'All Bush and Big Picture - the Canberra Story'.

Cost \$110 for 2 days, \$77 concession; 1 day \$66, \$44 concession. Contact Mary Walsh at the Centre for Australian Cultural Studies tel. 02 6268 8812 or m.walsh@adfa.edu.au for full program and registration form. Concession rates for Society members.

### **Glebe Incinerator and John Fletcher site competition**

Australand Holding Limited and Leichhardt Council have conducted a limited architectural competition for a major residential site on Blackwattle Bay, Glebe. This site includes Walter Burley Griffin's Glebe Incinerator and colonnaded sheds, and the adjoining John Fletcher container site. Five firms

participated in the competition. The winner was Synman, Justin & Bialek. Architectural firms Order, and Cox Richardson were both commended.

What remains of the Glebe Incinerator is a very significant element, but only a fragment of the original. The Society believes that it is most important that any new work should indicate the full scope and scale of the whole original building and enhance its architectural integrity. The site's developer Australand Holding Limited should be required to retain and reconstruct or interpret missing elements of the incinerator and colonnaded sheds in accordance with the Conservation Plan prepared by Meredith Walker and Trevor Waters, and with the Conservation Masterplan.

### **Historic Houses Trust of NSW acquires Griffin drawing on silk**

Of seven Griffin items auctioned by Phillips on 31 July, two were purchased by Historic Houses Trust of NSW (HHT). It was very pleasing that two of the pieces, the drawing on silk of GSDA No.1 and 2 Dwellings, and the Chinese carpet that the Griffins owned while living in the Grant House, were placed in public ownership by HHT which has had a connection with the Griffin story with the successful purchase, conservation and sale of GSDA No.1 Dwelling. A third item, a presentation of the Ricker Dwelling, Grinnell, Iowa, was purchased by Grinnell College which has recently acquired the Ricker Dwelling. The Society was very disappointed that all seven items could not have found their way into public institutions.

### **Unauthorised work at the Eric Pratten House**

One of the state's most important properties, the magnificent State Heritage Listed house and garden

designed by Walter Burley Griffin called the "Eric Pratten House" or "Coppins" at 29 Telegraph Road, Pymble has undergone extensive unauthorised internal renovation by its new owners.

The house and its garden were built in the 1930s and are a superb example of Walter Burley Griffin's work. It is a grand house with a sequence of fine rooms that embrace the garden. The garden was a joint project of Walter Burley Griffin and the original owner Eric Pratten.

Prior to its purchase six months ago, the house has had essentially only two owners who have carefully retained and respected the design and detailing of both the house and garden which includes a sweeping driveway, sunken garden with pond, tennis court with beautiful large sandstone retaining walls, swimming pool and pool house.

Swift action was taken by Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council and the NSW Heritage Office which quickly issued Stop Work Orders. In spite of this the new owners continued the demolition of all five bathrooms including two original bathrooms and the damaging of the garden's perimeter until an on-site meeting with an officer from the Heritage Office on 10 October. The work commenced on or about 2 October and after issue of the first Stop Work Order, neighbours reported that the work stepped up in intensity continuing until about 7pm each night and on the weekend.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society's President, Adrienne Kabos has stated that "The Eric Pratten House and its garden are of national and international significance and this unapproved work amounts to the most appalling heritage vandalism." The Walter Burley Griffin Society has called on the NSW Heritage Office and Ku-ring-gai Council to require a full reinstatement and restoration of the house's interior and garden, and the imposition of maximum fines. As reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Geraldine O'Brien on 15.10.01, the Council and Heritage Office are looking at further action including reinstatement and prosecution.

### **Report on Future Canberra conference**

In May 1901, a 'Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors, and Others Interested in the Building of the Federal Capital of Australia' was convened in Melbourne. Similarly, a century later a series of events was held in the national capital that eventuated. Organised by the Planning and Land Management division of the ACT government, 'Future Canberra' encompassed a series of events from 9-11 May. 'Future Canberra' aimed to 'celebrate Canberra's unique character and community and 100 years of planning and development of Australia's federal capital, renew national/international recognition of Canberra as one of the great planned cities of the world, and foster and generate community participation in

development strategies' (see: [http://www.palm.gov.au/future canberra](http://www.palm.gov.au/future%20canberra)).

An important opening event was the RAIA's annual Walter Burley Griffin Memorial Lecture, this year celebrating its fortieth anniversary, on 9 May (the date of the lecture was shifted from November in order to coincide with 'Future Canberra'). This year's oration was delivered by noted urbanist Dr Christine Boyer of Princeton University. To an audience of over 200 people, Dr Boyer lectured on 'The Magical Worlds of Marion Mahony Griffin' as derived from close study and textual analysis of *The Magic of America* manuscript deposited at the New York Historical Society. Dr Boyer intriguingly identified similarities between the structure of *Magic* and Louis Sullivan's writings. She also assessed that 'the shock of the atomic bombing of Japan, together with the development of US imperialist strength after World War II, may have led to [Marion's] abrupt dropping of the manuscript in 1949'.

Christopher Vernon, University of Western Australia, was the respondent to the lecture. Vernon's amplified Dr Boyer's references to the 'fit' of people within nature, aboriginal culture, and the enigma of Mahony's inked erasure of Walter's name from her drawings.

The week's highlight was the 'Future Canberra' conference, held at the new and controversial National Museum of Australia. Central to the event was the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's report on its study of Canberra. Despite the emphasis given 'the future' and economic development, the Griffin legacy was not overlooked. Memorable recognition of this came in Governor-General Sir William Deane's opening speech. Therein Sir William assessed that: 'Many individuals have contributed to the development of Canberra. But one stands out above all others as the individual whose vision, intelligence and imaginative capacity did most to shape this city. That person is, of course, Walter Burley Griffin. It is appropriate that, at the commencement of this Conference, something should be said about him. It is largely upon his planning that Canberra Future, as well as Canberra Present, will stand'. Characterising Griffin's plan as one of 'apparent simplicity' which 'hid a complexity of extraordinary ideas'.

Sir William then recounted his family's move to Canberra in 1933, when the city 'still lay lightly, as a kind of sketch plan, on the landscape'. As Sir William so eloquently suggested, Canberra's past, including Griffin's legacy, is integral to Canberra's Future.

The day closed with a screening of films on Canberra, including Belinda and Gaby Mason's award-winning 'City of Dreams'.

One of the concluding *Future Canberra* events was

a Design Forum, held on 11 May at the University of Canberra (sponsored by the RAlA and AILA). There Boyer and Vernon were asked to offer insights into potential future directions for architecture and landscape architecture in Canberra.

Christopher Vernon, University of Western Australia

## **Griffin Canberra competition drawings lost and found**

Walter Burley Griffin's drawings of Canberra are a cherished and highly important part of the National Archives of Australia's collection, but have not always been looked after with the same level of care they now receive. In fact for a long period no one really cared at all.

The story of these drawings between 1912 and today is one of neglect, chance and strange disappearances.

Walter Burley Griffin's plan of Canberra was submitted to the 1912 Federal Capital Design Competition in the form of watercolour drawings by Marion Mahony. When the drawings arrived in Melbourne from Chicago, they passed into the custody of the Department of Home Affairs. After Walter Burley Griffin was declared the winner of the competition, the drawings were purchased by the Commonwealth. Photographs taken at around this time reveal that even at this early stage some of the drawings had already been torn.

In late 1912 the drawings were moved to Canberra for use by the Federal Capital Commission. In 1913 they were back in Melbourne, in the basement of Government House. For storage they were removed from their stretchers, rolled up and placed in galvanised cylinders, which carried the risk of creasing, scratching and other damage.

In late 1913 the drawings were cleaned and stretched on frames for a town planning exhibition held in Sydney. In 1917 a set of slotted, zinc-lined chests was constructed to house the drawings. The same year the drawings were transported to Adelaide for exhibition at the Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition.

In 1925 Mr CS Daley, Secretary of the Federal Capital Commission, pointed out the historical significance of the drawings and stated that they should be stored with the Archives of the Commonwealth.

From this time, documentary evidence about the drawings dries up and it was not until 1953 that they were heard of again. In November of that year the drawings were "rediscovered", packed in five wooden crates in a Department of Works workshop in the Canberra suburb of Kingston. They were taken into the custody of the Commonwealth National Library, Archives Division on 6 November 1953.

In 1961 the Commonwealth Archives Office was

established as an autonomous unit and the drawings became part of its holdings. During the 1960s the drawings were sent away for expert conservation treatment twice. The treatment they received, in hindsight, was far from ideal, leaving the drawings adhered to sheets of chipboard with starch paste.

Finally, in the early 1990s the drawings received the conservation treatment they deserved. The National Archives cleaned the drawings, removed them from the chipboard, mended them and placed them on new stretcher frames.

The full set of these well-travelled drawings will be displayed in an exhibition about the Griffins' competition entry, at the National Archives Canberra building from mid-April to mid-August 2002.

Ian Batterham, Assistant Director Preservation, National Archives of Australia.

## **Griffin Federation Track officially opened**

The Griffin Federation Track was officially opened by Mr Joe Hockey, Member for North Sydney and Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, and Cr Pat Reilly, Mayor of Willoughby City Council, on 16 September at a ribbon cutting ceremony at Turret Reserve, Castlecrag. The track links the Willoughby Incinerator with the Griffin Conservation Area at Castlecrag designed by Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin.

The track celebrates the invaluable legacy created in Willoughby City by the Griffins, designers of the Federal capital. Their design for Canberra was innovative and inspirational, and represented the cutting edge of urban planning, although sadly it was never properly realised. At Castlecrag, the Griffins designed an urban community in harmony with the Australian landscape on the foreshores of Middle Harbour. These Griffin Estates, now called the Griffin Conservation Area, are 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.

The Griffin Federation Track is devoted to the advancement of that vision. It was funded by a grant, from the Commonwealth Government's Federation Community Projects Program, awarded to the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc., and by additional funding from Willoughby City Council.

Preparation of the Griffin Federation Track by Willoughby City Council began two years ago and has been expertly managed by Council officers Alfred Bernhard and James Smallhorn who have supervised a team of bush regenerators and stone masons. The track goes along the Keep Reserve between Castlecrag and Northbridge and follows the creek up through what were once market gardens to Alpha Road and then on to Willoughby Incinerator designed by Walter Burley Griffin in 1934 in Small

Street, at what is now Bicentennial Reserve.

At the official opening of the track Professor Carrick Chambers, former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens and committee member of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc., highlighted the importance of the track and its links to other walking tracks in Willoughby City. He also expressed the desire for the track to include, in the near future, a pedestrian tunnel under Eastern Valley Way to create a safe crossing for pedestrians, of this extremely busy road.

### In memory of notable people in the Griffin story

**Sir John Overall**, architect and planner (1913-2001)

For five years from 1953, Overall was the Commonwealth Government chief architect. When the Menzies government determined that Defence and the rest of the Public Service had to be brought to Canberra to make it a capital in reality as well as in name, Overall was appointed to lead the design and development of the new city. As the first Commissioner of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), he gathered a team of planners and designers that respected the work of Walter Burley Griffin. Under his leadership over 14 years, the NCDC took Australia's national capital from a struggling country town of 39,000 people to a burgeoning city of 174,000. It planned for a further tripling of that population, and most importantly implemented the construction of Lake Burley Griffin. (edited from Sydney Morning Herald, 13.9.01)

**Professor Paul Reid**, architect (1933-2001).

Born in New Zealand, Paul Reid worked in New York and Cambridge before being appointed as Director of Architecture at the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in 1968. In this role he advocated a return to the ideas and planning principles inherent in Griffin's masterplan. In 1974 he was appointed Chief Architect, a position he held for nearly ten years. In 1985 he was appointed as Professor of Architecture at the University of NSW, working on urban issues until his

retirement in 1998. Before his death, he was able to see one of the first proofs of his book on the genesis and evolution of Canberra as a city. National Archives

of Australia is publishing the book titled "Canberra following Griffin: A design history of Australia's national capital", and will launch it next March. (edited from Sydney Morning Herald, 19.9.01)

**Sylvia Brose**, educator (1915-2001)

It was in the '30s that Sylvia Brose was first introduced to the lively anthroposophical community at Castlecrag which included Marion and Walter Griffin, and Eric Nicholls (later to become a co-founder of Glenaeon). She wrote and performed many plays in the amphitheatre at Castlecrag, and began her studies of anthroposophy and the works and words of Dr Steiner. After teaching at Frencham she went to Edinburgh in 1952 to train and work as a Steiner teacher. In 1956 she was called to be the founding teacher of the first school in Australia. Her first class at Dalcross, now known as Glenaeon, had just three pupils. Through her efforts and trailblazing there are now 35 schools around Australia. (edited from Sydney Morning Herald, 29.9.01)

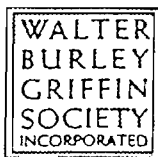
**Bill Lucas**, architect (1924-2001)

Architect Bill Lucas contributed much to the spirit of Castlecrag with some of his significant houses in the late 1950s and early 60s including a group of four in The Bulwark. The best known of these is No.80 The Bulwark, commonly known as The Glass House, which he and his architect wife Ruth built in 1957 and occupied until 1974. Bill Lucas was a most influential architect through his progressive architectural thinking and social attitudes. He produced a very substantial body of work and, through his teaching, was an important influence on a whole generation of Sydney architects. (Peter Moffitt, The Crag, No.139)

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

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### MEMBERSHIP FORM



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### MEMBERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

Please make cheque payable to  
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post it to  
The Treasurer at 140 Edinburgh Rd, Castlecrag, NSW 2068.

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