

News Update

October 1996

Fire at Willoughby Incinerator

Sydney's last intact incinerator designed by Walter Burley Griffin was ravaged by fire in the early hours of 31 July. Unfortunately the interior and roof of original green concrete roof tiles were badly damaged but fortunately the sandstone and concrete walls remain intact.

Willoughby Council renovated the incinerator in the early 1980s and it was tenanted by a restaurant for some years and more recently as business offices. Fire investigators believe that it was arson following a burglary of the tenant's offices.

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held outside the fire-damaged incinerator on Sunday 27 October. It will commence at 2.30pm and at 3.15pm our guest speaker, a conservation architect from Graham Brooks and Associates who have recently prepared a heritage impact assessment on the incinerator, will talk about the conservation work to be done on it.

Light refreshments will be served. All welcome.

New Griffin books

Walter Burley Griffin in America: a beautiful coffee-table-style book by Mati Maldre, professor of photography at Chicago State University, and Paul Kruty, professor of architectural history at University of Illinois.

The book contains nearly 200 superb black and white photographs by Mati Maldre of the 65 Griffin buildings in the United States. (Those members who were able to attend the Society's 1992 meeting when Mati Maldre who was visiting Australia at the time, was guest speaker, will recall some of his magnificent photos).

Accompanying the photographs is a selected bibliography and a catalogue of Griffin's American buildings, and very valuable essays written by Mati Maldre and Paul Kruty. Kruty describes Griffin's remarkable body of work produced between 1899 and 1914 in the USA, mostly in the Chicago area, and notes that it "*forms a neglected chapter in the history of American architecture*". Kruty explains that in the USA in the past Griffin has been overshadowed by fellow Prairie School architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright but that "*it is time to accord Griffin a place*

near them". Certain architectural inventions usually attributed to Wright - such as the L-shaped floor plan, attached garage and carport - actually appeared first in Griffin's work. Kruty states that "*Part of what obscured Griffin's reputation was that he went off to Australia*" after winning the international competition for Canberra, just as he was gaining recognition in the US,

The book is published by the University of Illinois Press (1996), costs \$50US and is only available in Australia by special order.

The Early Canberra House: Living in Canberra 1911-1933: A beautifully designed architectural book, edited and compiled by Peter Freeman, which contains information on Griffin's early Canberra years including details of houses he designed for Canberra. The book is published by The Federal Capital Federal Press of Aust.

In July 1920, while Director for Design and Construction of the Capital, Griffin submitted designs for a proposed Captain's Quarters at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. The proposed quarters were relatively large and incorporated themes from the 'prairie style' houses from the offices of Frank Lloyd Wright. The design placed great emphasis on symmetry, attention to detail and in eliciting the maximum effect from the functional elements of the interior. Each bedroom was provided with a fireplace and a 'built-in' wardrobe. All major rooms had vaulted internal ceilings and elaborate internal joinery. Griffin's designs were not pursued and humbler timber cottages were built. Also in 1920, Griffin put forward a proposal for a 'Home of Five Rooms' with an internal courtyard, which could be built in Canberra for 650 pounds.

In December 1920, the month Griffin resigned as Director for Design, he submitted drawings for 'artisan cottages' to the Minister of Works and Railways for approval. The details of the cottages were standardised, with arrangements except for verandahs, confined to simple rectangles. The smallest of the cottages was a controversial one-room plan, but great care was taken in all the designs on the external and internal joinery to provide beautifully crafted interiors for living. Griffin's cottage designs were amongst those considered in 1921 for erection as the first 'permanent' Canberra houses. However, the designs prepared by Colonel Owen's Department of Works & Railways were used instead.

Sectional and elevational models of Griffin's cottages were constructed by students of the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Canberra in 1993. These models formed the centre-piece of the RAlA-sponsored exhibition *Huts, Hostels, Houses: Living in Canberra 1911-1933* at Old Parliament House July-Sept. 1996.

Overhaul of NSW Heritage Laws

Last April in Heritage Week the NSW Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Hon. Craig Knowles MP, announced the long-awaited review of the state's heritage laws, proclaiming it *the biggest overhaulin twenty years*.

The Minister said that a Heritage Office, independent of the Department of Planning, would be created. Amongst its functions, and to be given priority, is the development and maintenance of a new State Heritage Inventory, which is to be up and running in the next twelve months. The function of the Heritage Office will include offering specialist advice to the community on heritage matters; the introduction of negligence provision for heritage properties; the introduction of a Heritage Fund of \$30m to be raised from the sale of the State Office Block and Landcom holdings; the development of a model Heritage Local environment Plan to demonstrate to local councils the most effective ways of protecting items of local importance.

The Minister is to be congratulated on this initiative which needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Inappropriate Mobile Phone Tower Proposal for Griffin Centre

The group of four shops now known as the Griffin Centre on the corner of Edinburgh Road and The Postern, Castlecrag, was built in 1924 only four years after the Greater Sydney Development Association purchased the Castlecrag Estate in which they were built. Together with the single shop just west of them, they were the first shops built at Castlecrag.

These shops included a butcher, hardware, grocery and baker. The baker's oven can still be seen today on the lowest level in the liquor shop. The stairs at the western end of the shops which now go down to the liquor shop, originally went down beneath the butchers and was where the ice would be taken to cool the meat. At the back there was a stable for the horse which used to pull the baker's delivery cart. Bread deliveries down the steeper streets of The Bastion and beyond however were done by the baker's son in a Vauxhall car.

The shops were built for Mr S A Spargo and were photographed in the promotional brochure published by Greater Sydney Development Association in approximately 1928. In more recent years the shops have been extended at the back and a fifth shop has been added at the eastern or carpark end, but importantly, they still retain their original character.

A Development Application to put a mobile phone tower/transmitter station and equipment shed on the roof of the Griffin Centre was lodged by *Vodafone* with Willoughby City Council. Given the heritage significance, the Society pointed out the inappropriateness of this DA to Council, and many residents objected on the potential harmful effects as well. We are pleased to report that at the Council meeting on 19 August 1996, it was rejected. A large mobile phone tower was recently erected only 1km away in Northbridge for Telstra. Urgent action by the federal government is needed to require all mobile phone service providers to share the towers, to prevent the unnecessary proliferation of these ugly towers.

STOP PRESS: A bureaucratic failure in the referral process has meant that the proposal has not been reviewed by the EPA and construction of the tower began last Monday 14th October.

Heritage Awards

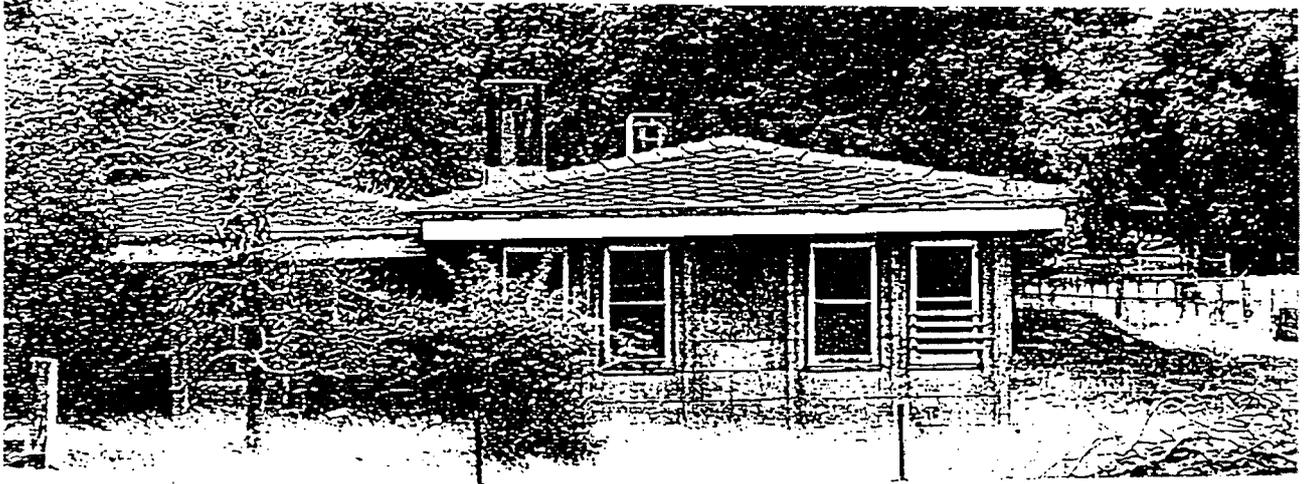
In Heritage Week last April the National Trust announced its 1996 Heritage Awards and for the category of Government bodies and larger organisations the winner was the conservation project of GSDA No.1 Dwelling, Castlecrag. The award was accepted by Historic Houses Trust (HHT) from the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, the Hon. Craig Knowles MP, who was the guest speaker at a glamorous awards luncheon at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Willoughby City Council also celebrated Heritage Week with inaugural heritage awards. Historic Houses Trust won the Restoration Category for GSDA No.1 Dwelling conservation project. It was won jointly with the owners of a federation house at 8 Albert Avenue, Chatswood. Sheridan Burke, the Trust's Senior Curatorial Co-ordinator and Peter Watts, Director of HHT, accepted the award from Jack Munday, guest of honour at the presentation of the awards. Winner of the Alterations and Additions category was the Duncan House at 8 The Barrette, Castlecrag. The Infill category had ten entries but no winner was awarded. Instead a commendation was made for HHT infill at 136A Edinburgh Road.

Griffin holiday house for sale

The *Wills House* was designed as a holiday home for Mabel LM Wills at Woodend, Victoria, by Walter Burley Griffin. It was built in 1922 and set on a 3 acre site. It now sits on a three-quarter acre block and still retains its oak trees, a huge holly hedge and magnificent views of Mt Macedon.

The National Trust describes the house as *One of Griffin's most brilliantly planned homes of Knitlock construction, the Wills residence is of national significance. The plan form is a combination of two diamonds and two squares all meeting at a central point*".



There is an elegant symmetry around the diagonal axis of linked, pavilion-like square modules. It is built of Knitlock, Griffin's patented building system and has a pitched roof of original Knitlock tiles. The Statement of Cultural Heritage Significance in the Victorian Heritage Register states: *"The house has a low pitched roof with shingle-like knitlock roofing tiles and low-overhanging eaves. Both the exterior and the interior of the building remain substantially intact, although some of the casement windows have been replaced with double-hung windows and the wall dividing the toilet and the bathroom has been removed. The materials and design of the Wills House conform to Griffin's principles regarding segmental architecture, requiring no veneer of tiles, plaster, textile, paper, enamel or paint."*

The Register also states: *"The building is a representative example of Griffin's domestic designs of the 1920s, however it also exists as a unique example in terms of its plan form which is structured using three linked modules. The Wills House is significant as a rationalised and resolved example of the work of Walter Burley Griffin and documents some of the devices employed by Griffin to minimise expenditure....the Knitlock blocks themselves were inexpensive to manufacture and required no additional materials such as paint or plaster and they allowed flexibility in design, form and plan."*

The one family has owned the house for the last 36 years and it is very intact. The only changes that have been done in the 74 years since it was built have been the replacement of the original moulded concrete bath and some of the pivot casement windows, and the addition of roof gutters. In years past it has been used for storing hay and needs much TLC and sympathetic conservation work.

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