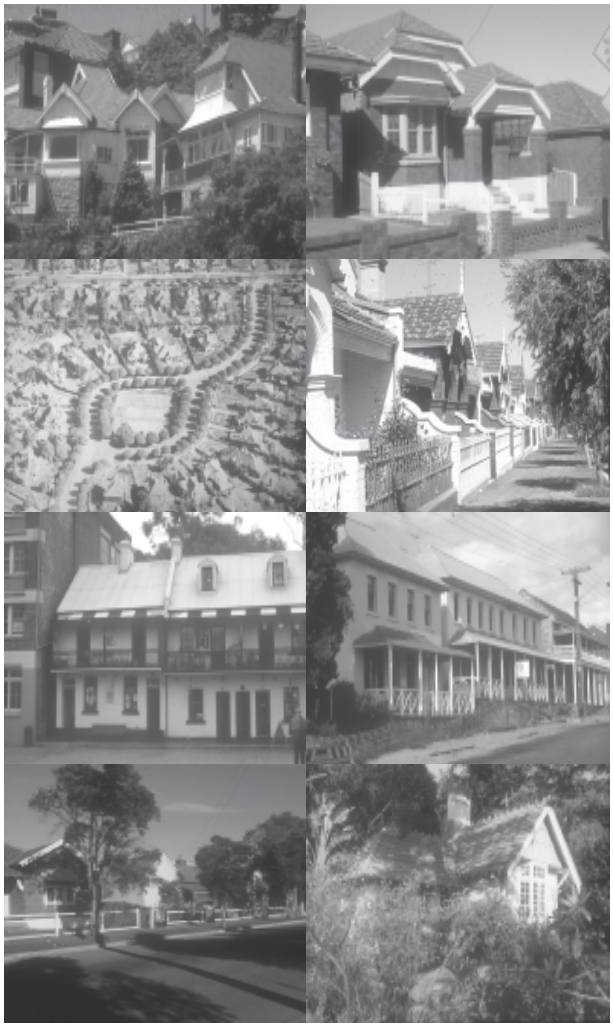
Suburbia:
A Conference



Papers presented at the National Trust of Australia (NSW) Conference
at the S. H. Ervin Gallery, Observatory Hill, Sydney
23 - 25 February 2002

Edited By Jacqui Goddard, Conservation Director

Harbour Foreshore Authority

rosecorp
DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S HERITAGE

BREAKFAST POINT

Suburbia: a Conference

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) thanks our sponsors Rosecorp, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and Planning NSW for making this conference possible.

BREAKFAST POINT

rosecorp
DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S HERITAGE

Harbour Foreshore Authority

We would also like to thank those you gave support and in kind contributions: Glenmore Meats, Tip Top Bakery, Lincraft, Ryde Council, Fairfield City Council, Patrick Turner and 2nd Mortdale Scout Group.

We are deeply indebted to all those who made the conference a success.

The National Trust of Australia (NSW)

This collection follows the Suburbia Conference which was held at the S. H. Ervin Gallery at the National Trust Centre at Observatory Hill on 25 February 2002 with tours on the preceding weekend 23-24 February 2002.

In accordance with the conference, dates and time frames referred to in individual papers have remained as they were at the time of presentation.

Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the National Trust of Australia (NSW).

Table of Contents

Preface

This conference aimed to look at the diversity and grain which defines a city's suburbs. A 'Call for Papers' was made in July 2001 and the response was overwhelming. A number of clear themes emerged which clearly echo the concerns of the day to day work of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) Conservation Department; in particular State government urban consolidation policies, the role of landscape and street patterns and the importance of those things we consider 'local'.

The conference was held in Sydney at the S. H. Ervin Gallery on Observatory Hill, Sydney's highest natural point. Observatory Hill is closely related to nearby Millers Point and the Rocks both areas of intense scrutiny by architects, archaeologists, social historians and tourists. It is unlikely that any other urban area in Australia has been the subject of such close examination. Millers Point is also the site of both Australia's first major urban renewal project and first conservation campaigns and although Observatory Hill overlooks some of Australia's oldest structures it also overlooks such contemporary transformations as the redevelopment or 'adaptive reuse' of the Walsh Bay wharves.

The *Strangers guide to Sydney* in 1861 stated 'the view here is so magnificent that we shall attempt no description of it. The Lighthouse is here visible, and the Heads. A fine view of the harbour is also obtained, and more of the town can be seen than from any other point.'[1] A fine view of Sydney, its city, harbour and suburbs is still to be had from its grassy slopes.

It is inevitable that much of the discussion and many of the papers dealt with Sydney, without doubt a 'suburban city', however papers were also presented which looked at issues from urban sprawl in regional NSW (Suburbia on Steroids), national and international trends in the do-it-yourself market (Home Improvement: Suburban works in progress) to an examination of local authority tenants in England (On the Council).

Other issues were the changing demographics in Canterbury (Streetscape in Suburbia), the rich cultural diversity of Fairfield (From Cobra Grubs to Dragons), the legacy of the builder (Builders and Barbecues), model suburbs (The Healthy Suburb), the role of the Pacific Highway on a section of Sydney (Urban Space in Suburbs), planning policies (Urban Consolidation: Sound Policy or Fad) and a look at community gardening in three Pacific Rim cities (Plotting Eden).

The conference was supported by tours of four suburban areas of Sydney on the preceding weekend (23-24 February 2002). The areas were Fairfield and Canterbury as well as Ryde and North Sydney . The conference was accompanied by a photographic exhibition of Sydney Harbour by Sydney photographer Peter Solness.

Our aim was to engender debate and we have planned further talks on issues raised by the conference as part of the Wyatt Series of Lectures for 2002. Two papers submitted but not chosen for presentation on 25 February have been selected for inclusion in this publication.

References

1 quoted in Pickett and Lomb, *Observer and Observed*, Powerhouse Publishing 2001, p28

The Living Harbour: Photographs of Sydney Harbour between 1988 and 1989

Peter Solness

The conference was accompanied by a photographic exhibition entitled The Living Harbour by Peter Solness. These enlarged prints were selected from a series produced for the book *Sydney Harbour* written by Christopher Sweeney and published in 1989 by Collins.

The 'idea' behind the book was to depict the interactions of Sydneysiders with their harbour. The harbour has often been portrayed in photographs as an aesthetically beautiful place, which it is. But the harbour is much more than that. The harbour is also a working and living environment, with a unique dynamic, that makes it a fascinating and diverse subject for consideration.

The harbour is constantly evolving due to its intense human engagement. The images selected for this exhibition emphasized this point. Even in the brief 14 years since the pictures were taken a number of the scenes are unrecognisable today.

Peter Solness is a Sydney based photojournalist with 25 years experience. He has photographed for most Australian newspaper and magazine publications, including the Sydney Morning Herald and the Melbourne Age, as well as a string of international publications such as the London Independent, Time Magazine, Telerama and German GEO. He has worked on countless documentary film assignments, has exhibited his work widely (most recently at Stills Gallery in Paddington) and has been the principle photographer for over 8 publications and contributor to many more.

His most recent book, *Tree Stories,* which studies the value of trees as they were perceived by a broad range of Australians, was published by Chapter and Verse in 1999. Peter is a member of the Networkphotographers Photo agency in Sydney.

Opening Address

Minister for Planning, Dr Andrew Refshauge MP

Congratulations to the National Trust for organising this conference. I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are on the land of the Eora people.

Sydney is one of the most stunning cities in the world. It is a place of breathtaking physical beauty, it boasts a magnificent cultural heritage and it is the economic powerhouse of the country. Sydney also bears the major burden of the nation's population growth, and most of us, whether long term residents or new arrivals, live in the suburbs.

It is within Australian cities, especially Sydney, that we as a society face our greatest planning and design challenges. But whatever the challenges facing us we need to remember that Sydney has a lifestyle that is envied by much of the world. We offer, on a scale of choice perhaps greater than any other world city, a broad range of quality homes in healthy, vibrant neighbourhoods. Clustered around the waterways that are our Harbour, Botany Bay, Pittwater and the Parramatta and Georges Rivers, our communities set international benchmarks for livability and quality of life.

As Minister for Planning and Minister responsible for Heritage, I am working to ensure that our children can still enjoy the quality of life we cherish 30 years from now. That they can still grow up comfortably and happily here in Sydney: choosing from a range of homes and jobs appropriate to the different stages of their changing lives; living in a clean, safe environment that promotes a healthy, prosperous life; and continuing to appreciate and enjoy our environmental heritage. I would now like to discuss some of the particular challenges we face and some things we are doing as a Government to ensure our children will still have a great city to live in.

Challenges

Sydney's current population of 4.1 million is forecast to grow to 4.9 million by 2026 so it is our duty to plan responsibly to manage this growth. 53,000 more people are coming to live in Sydney each year and that means we are increasing in population by 1,000 people a week. We need to accommodate this increase. But let me be clear; the Government does not want to see apartments in every street.

Sydney will continue to be a city primarily made up of suburbs with homes and backyards. Now 63% of homes in Sydney are what people consider to be the traditional family home, with a front and back yard, and in twenty years

this figure will be 61%.

People over 55 are projected to comprise one-third of the population by 2026. That is one million older people than there are now in NSW. Couples without children are projected to increase by an extraordinary 60% over the next twenty years. By 2021 couples without children may well overtake those with children to become the most common family type. So we have three key challenges: population growth, ageing of the population and smaller household size.

The Government's Plans

A busy contemporary lifestyle, smaller average family sizes, and more older people in our community means we must provide new housing and more housing choice. While the government wants to see many of these new homes built around public transport routes, a significant proportion will continue to be built on new land opening up on the city's fringe.

Without the Government's plans, demand will further outstrip supply making a home in Sydney even more expensive for families. We especially want to make better use of old and disused industrial sites, and redevelop these areas for housing. We encourage urban renewal projects. The redevelopment which is occurring in Green Square is an example of what promises to be a highly successful urban renewal project. This former industrial area is being transformed into a quality built environment which, when completed, will be a home to over 25,000 people and will provide a workplace for 46,000 people.

Land Release

In December last year we announced the opening up of major new tracts of land to help provide homes for Sydney families. It is a fifteen year plan which will see 17,000 hectares or more than 89,000 lots become available for housing in the South West, West and North West corridors. This land will be planned for and developed in a new way. Roads, public transport, hospitals and schools are to be delivered at the same time as new housing land. People will not be moving into their dream home in a new suburb without the necessary infrastructure being in place.

Detailed planning for all land will include rigorous environmental studies to protect the area's biodiversity; transport plans; water supply; stormwater and sewerage plans; and the layout of suburbs for housing, employment and community facilities.

We will be working to achieve a balance to protect the environment as we provide these new homes and services. Good urban design will be a vital element in each release area to ensure housing choice, local shops and good access to public transport. We see that our land release programme will help stabilise prices for new lots and reduce pressure on finding new development sites in existing suburbs. Taking that pressure off helps to maintain the character of our suburbs.

Design Quality Programme

As I said, we don't want, or need, apartments in every street. But where they are built, the design should be of high quality. As many of you would be aware, the Government has a programme in place to improve the quality of urban design. The Premier has put the issue of residential flat design firmly on the agenda.

We are now making design quality a fundamental matter for consideration when determining a development application. We have a draft state planning policy which will very shortly be finalised, requiring that a building design has been prepared or directed by a qualified designer. A model Development Control Plan is being prepared that will result in better controls along a more consistent format, making them easier to understand and easier to apply. In addition, we have piloted Design Review Panels to offer independent design advice to Councilors. These are already underway in southern and inner-western Sydney. We've also released a Pattern Book and website.

These outline best practice case studies of residential flat development to assist and inspire planners, developers, building designers, architects, councils and industry. The website has recorded more than 11,000 hits, so we are obviously meeting a need. I'm confident this package of design reforms will do much to lift the quality of residential flat design in our city and suburbs.

Balanced Approach

The Government's urban policy directions are about balance. A balance that caters for children starting out in life, people who are having a family, people who do not have families and people who are retiring. It is a balance that will

prevent a Los Angeles like urban sprawl and the air pollution problems of a place like Mexico City. It's a balance that also allows for more parks and open space.

As many of you would be aware, just last week the Premier and I announced our attention to acquire the two and a half hectares of Ballast Point so that it would become a park for the people of Sydney to enjoy. This is not just a block of land. It is a unique site on our harbour that will soon be a green headland. Over the last few years, the Government has also acted to increase the amount of open space in Western Sydney. In fact, we've purchased over 600 hectares of land to be used as open space.

Heritage Issues

The Government's plans for the city and its suburbs are about protecting what makes Sydney special; our coast, our waterways, our national parks, our neighbourhoods and our heritage. We need to achieve a balanced approach between heritage considerations and development, with the aim of achieving a high level of consideration and urban design. Clearly the retention of existing buildings that are valued by the community enhances our suburbs and our environment.

Heritage considerations are now recognised as a key part of the planning system, with the Heritage Council being a consent authority. The Heritage Act and our management system means that some buildings, which could have been lost forever, are now used in a contemporary context and have a secure future.

We now have over 20,000 statutory listings of heritage places on Local Environment Plans, Regional Environment Plans and the State Heritage Register. This means that while we are managing the challenges created by population growth, ageing population and smaller household size, we are protecting those items from our past we value and which give resonance and meaning to our life in the present.

Some recent examples include the Government's decision to transfer *Linwood Hall* to the Heritage Office. *Linwood Hall* is a significant heritage item to the people of Guildford, and the Heritage Office will work with the community to develop a plan for the long-term use of the building. We've also protected properties at *15, 17 and 57 Cremorne Road, Cremorne Point.* These locally significant houses which were threatened with demolition have now been added to the LEP.

Williamson House in Mosman is a State significant Harry Seidler designed house which pioneered the use of suspended slabs on piers in domestic architecture in Australia. It was nominated by the Seidlers for an Interim Heritage Order following a proposal by the owner to demolish. The house has now been sold and the new owners propose to engage Seidler to restore the property. We intend to list this property on the State Heritage Register.

Another property we have protected is at *14 Clifton Street, Balmain*. The property is a waterfront residence in Balmain with elements constructed between the 1840s and 1913 including a boatshed. It is considered locally significant for its ability to demonstrate waterfront residential activities in an inner Sydney suburb in the nineteenth century, and is now listed on the LEP.

Today I am very pleased to announce that I have approved the listing of 16 National Trust properties on the State Heritage Register. These properties include *Everglades*, the *Norman Lindsay Gallery* and *Woodford Academy* in the Blue Mountains, *Harpers Mansion* in Berrima, the *Tenterfield School of Arts* and the Stella *James House* at Avalon. This builds on our previous listing of National Trust properties when Old Government House and Experiment Farm were added to the State Heritage Register. These new listings mean we now have a total of 1394 items on the State Heritage Register. And now all state significant National Trust properties will be on the State Heritage Register.

Another great benefit to managing the State's heritage is the recent amendment to the Heritage Act which will allow whole precincts to be listed on the State Heritage Register. This means significant areas or indeed a whole suburb can now be added to the Register provided it meets the criteria for listing. We already have several potential precincts in both Sydney and regional NSW which could be listed.

Such a listing will not prevent suburbs or precincts from changing. We're not about to prevent people from making appropriate changes to Federation Houses so they can have modern kitchens and bathrooms. What listing will achieve is the recognition that certain historic precincts are vital parts of our heritage and significant in understanding the story of modern Australia. The listing of whole precincts will be done carefully and in consultation with the community. We're not going to be doing a thousand listings overnight. We want to get it right and achieve the balanced approach I've mentioned before.

Conclusion

We need to make sure Sydney continues to be a great place to live for future generations. We need to plan for the

future. We need to protect both our natural and cultural heritage and we need to effectively manage growth and respond to the changes occurring in the community. Great cities don't happen by chance. They happen when we share a vision about a better future and we work together to deliver that vision. And on that note, I am pleased to launch the Suburbia Conference and welcome you to the suburbs.

Dr Andrew Refshauge, MP is Deputy Premier, Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Housing in the New South Wales Government. He graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of Sydney in 1973, His interest in, and commitment to, Aboriginal health issues was demonstrated in his early career in his role in the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern NSW and as Visiting Medical Officer (Aboriginal Health) in the NSW Prison Medical Service.

In 1974, Dr Refshauge founded the Doctor's Reform Society, in which he continued to play a role as Secretary and then as President until 1984. He has held a range of diverse roles including Fellow of the Senate of the University of Sydney, Member of the Executive Committee of the H V Evatt Memorial Foundation and Director of the Mandela Foundation.

In 1983, Dr Refshauge was elected as Member for Marrickville in the New South Wales Parliament. In 1988 he was elected Deputy Leader of the Opposition. In March 1995 he was appointed Deputy Premier, Minister for Health and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and in March 1999 he was appointed to his current position.

Breakfast Point

Bob Rose

Minister for Planning, the Honorable Andrew Refshauge, Delegates and guests, good morning. Thankyou for the opportunity of addressing this important conference. As a residential developer in Sydney I feel a deep sense of responsibility for ensuring that our projects will be well judged by posterity.

When the first Fleet arrived in Sydney in 1788, Captain John Hunter set about charting the harbour. His records show that early on the fifth day he sailed west, up what is now the Parramatta River. After about 10 kilometres he put ashore to make tea and have refreshments. He made his first charting at this spot and named it Breakfast Point. There is a note which records this point of landing adding that a group of natives watched from the northern shore, now known as the suburb of Putney. The name Breakfast Point has always been recorded but for many years AGL used the land for making gas and it was known as part of the adjoining suburb, Mortlake.

I was attracted to this conference by its title – *Suburbia*. In a sense the Rosecorp philosophy hinges on that very word. Our design criteria for Breakfast Point does not include minimalism, cutting-edge, high-tech and other images rather, we look to the words:

1 Sense of community
2 Quality
3 Spirit
4 Environment

To provide our designers with a canvas to work with. You will note from our Rosecorp logo that we see ourselves as 'developing tomorrows heritage.'

A number of carefully selected architectural firms work in partnership with our in-house design team to ensure that we achieve our vision. Together we create:

Traditional styling
Exceptional landscaped gardens
Light filled rooms
Memorable spacing
Huge covered veranda's, an essential inclusion which are designed to unite indoor and outdoor living
A surprise at every turn
Vast parks and waterfront activity zones

We trust that these amenities are of such a standard that a true community spirit can be developed and be nurtured by our Estate management team.

With all the amenities we provide at Breakfast Point you would be forgiven for thinking that it is a gated estate but it isn't. Breakfast Point is truly integrated with the existing community. Its parks, open spaces, waterfront precincts, sports oval, ecumenical hall and village centre will be for all to use and enjoy.

Reuse of Existing Buildings

There are a number of significant and magnificent heritage buildings in our care at Breakfast Point which were part of the former industrial use of this land. We are very conscious of our responsibility to protect them. In our development budget we ensure a substantial amount is set aside for these beautiful buildings ensuring appropriate refurbishment and integration into our new community through adaptive reuse.

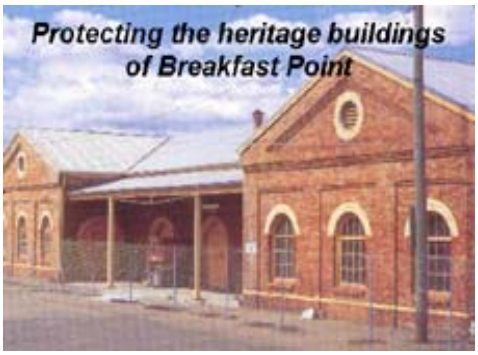


Figure 1: Blacksmiths Shop

Figure 2: Powerhouse

Figure 3: Wharf

Breakfast Point is now well under way and when completed in about 2010 it will be one of Sydney's premier suburbs and home to some 5,000 people. It's an exciting story and one which I would very much enjoy discussing with you in more detail. Breakfast Point is OUR vision of NEW SUBURBIA.

Rosecorp is also completing a nearby award winning development, Cape Cabarita, a residential community of some 200 dwellings in a beautifully landscaped environment.

The work that I would like to think our family will leave on developments such as Breakfast Point and Cape Cabarita is a timeless elegance in the design of the buildings and a continuing sense of community spirit among those who will live there.

Thankyou and I wish you success and enjoyment with the Suburbia Conference.

Bob Rose is an entrepreneur behind one of Sydney's biggest residential developments, the Breakfast Point project on the Parramatta River. His company, Rosecorp, established in 1983 by Rose and his wife Margaret, is undertaking Breakfast Point as a joint venture with C+BUS, the construction industry's superannuation fund. The development, on a 52-hectare site that was once home to an AGL gasworks, will take nine years to complete and will include 1650 dwellings and retail, commercial and recreational facilities.

Over the past 19 years, the Roses have been developing prestige homes, industrial land subdivisions and commercial and retail developments. In October last year, Rosecorp bought a building in East Sydney that formerly belonged to the New South Wales Liberal Party as its new corporate headquarters.

Rosecorp has developed service stations for, and with, Shell Australia and retains some of the sites, including the Shell service station in Sydney's Epping. Rosecorp's other big residential development is Cape Cabarita, which overlooks Hen and Chicken Bay in western Sydney. Rose bought out his joint-venture partner, Continental Venture Capital, from the nearly completed project last year and is developing the final stage of 18 luxury homes.

Pyrmont: Urban Renewal For The 21st Century

Bob Deacon

Thank you for the opportunity of presenting to you a view in counterpoint to many of the papers you will hear today. My name is Bob Deacon, and I'm the Director of the Built Environment Division at the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. For those of you who aren't aware of the Authority's charter, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority is a land management group for the State Government, and manages significant foreshore areas including: The Rocks, Darling Harbour, Circular Quay, Luna Park, Pyrmont, Ultimo and the Australian Technology Park.

Bob Rose of Rosecorp has spoken about his company's plans to build a new suburban complex at Breakfast Point, described as the suburban heritage of the future. I therefore consider it particularly relevant to present the case study on Pyrmont, which is also about building housing for the future, but housing that addresses a different future need.

The redevelopment of Pyrmont has been unique in Sydney's history of urban renewal. It was an opportunity that only comes along once in a generation, and was made possible by the significant land holdings of the State Government. However, before looking at the renewal of Pyrmont in detail, I will present an overview of housing trends from the late 19th century, through the 20th century and onward into the 21st century.

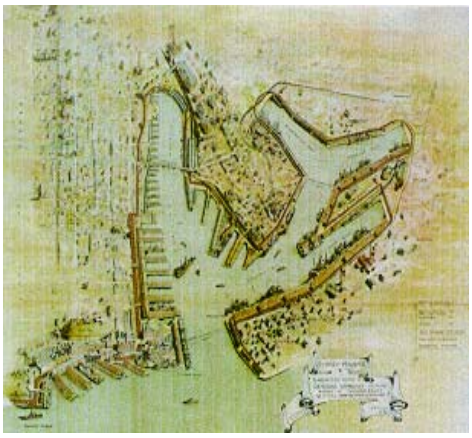


Figure 1: Pyrmont, an integral part of Sydney's working harbour in the early 20th century

The Suburban House

The development of the suburban house in Sydney was the product of the late 19th century Victorian social ideal of 'the home', and 'the home' was best exemplified by a detached house set in a landscaped suburban block.

The growth of Australian suburban housing in the late 19th century was made possible by the rapid introduction of public transport, which provided easy access to inexpensive land. Simultaneously, the mechanisation and standardisation of the Australian building industry produced cheaper building materials and made housing more affordable to a majority of the population.

Households

While we still uphold the nuclear family (Mum, Dad, and 2.5 children), as the most desirable model, it is gradually becoming less the typical situation. In his introductory speech the Minister provided a series of statistics showing the trends in the composition and age of households in the 21st century. The reduction in the size of households is reflected in census figures over the last 85 years, in which there has been a drop from 4.5 people (1911) to 3 (1996) per household. And this downward trend is predicted to continue. It should be noted that these statistics are Australia-wide, and that there is a more marked differentiation in metropolitan Sydney, particularly in the inner city areas.

In conjunction with smaller households is the fact that we are changing our place of residence more frequently; on average every 7 years. Again, this figure is expected to reduce as the number of 'empty nesters' increases. (You might ask yourself when did you move house last, and when do you anticipate moving in the future?)

Our increasing movements between residences is related to our accommodation needs associated with the different stages of our lives. In broad terms these are:

- child, living with family;
- young adult, living alone or sharing with others;
- parent, living with children; and
- mature person, living without children.

Housing Types

As the predominance of the traditional household eroded throughout the 20th century the choices in housing types gradually increased. New housing types were designed and built to appeal to particular segments in the housing market.

In the 1930s small apartments (Potts Point), were designed to be occupied by single professionals. In the 1960s artists and university students, seeking an alternative lifestyle, refurbished the terrace housing (Paddington and Glebe), mature couples moved out of the family home into freestanding high-rise apartment blocks (Darling Point); and young couples rented three storey walk up flats (Summer Hill). In the 1970s cluster housing and townhouses (lower North Shore, and as far afield as Campbelltown) offered an alternative to the detached suburban house.

However, the majority of housing was still being built in the ever-expanding suburbs, and the need to plan better urban development was evident. This prompted Government to instigate the Building Better Cities Program.

In looking at the urban renewal of Pyrmont, we need to acknowledge that the detached suburban house no longer satisfies the housing needs of all the population. The community in the 21st century demands a diversity of housing types.

Pyrmont, as it was

So, what were conditions like in Pyrmont in 1995? Most of the major industries that had sustained the area had either closed down or been relocated. The housing stock, apart from a small number of investment unit developments, was generally run down and did not serve a wide range of occupants. Prior to the implementation of the Building Better Cities Program there were approximately 3,000 people living in the Pyrmont area; generally the population was ageing and in decline.

In a joint Commonwealth/ State government initiative, clear objectives were established for the renewal of Pyrmont. The objectives included:

- a mixed community;
- a diversity in residential accommodation;

- a dynamic environment so that there was interaction within the area and with the surrounding areas in close proximity to the city.

With regard to employment opportunities, the objective was to replace the ageing industries with new 21st century technological industries such as media and telecommunications.

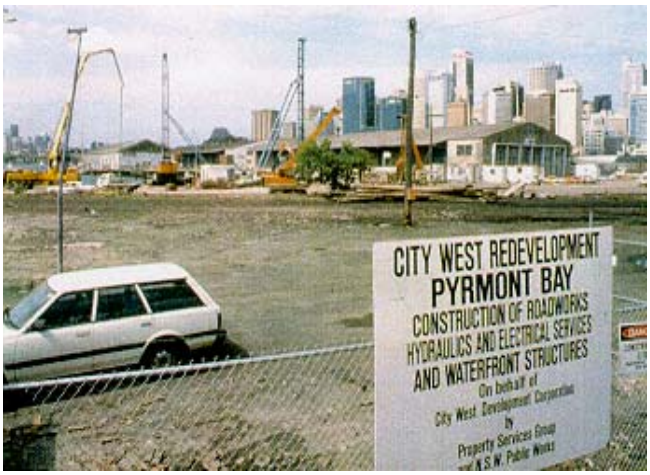


Figure 2: A disused industrial site in Pyrmont Bay awaiting redevelopment

Planning Process

The process included the preparation of a comprehensive Masterplan, which extended through to development consensus, and provided certainty and control of the outcome. Preparation of the Masterplan involved strong community consultation to ensure the plan reflected the background of the area. The Masterplan enjoyed a strong commitment from all tiers of government, who were keen to produce a good outcome and to follow it right through.

Most importantly, the project had funding committed from the Building Better Cities Program, in the order of $200 million, that allowed for provision of the infrastructure, services and community facilities, parks, playgrounds and roads. All of which allowed for the delivery of a sound end product.

Figure 3: Aerial view of new road, harbour park and redevelopment sites in Pyrmont

Pyrmont Achievements

The urban renewal of Pyrmont achieved a diversity of housing stock, including a range of public, affordable, rental and owner/occupier accommodation. The resident population has increased from 3,000 people to an estimated 10,000 now. This figure is projected to increase to 20,000 by 2013. More than 9 hectares of open space, foreshore walkways and cycle paths were created. Significant public transport infrastructure, including the Sydney light rail, ferry wharves and new bus routes, was instigated. Employment numbers in Pyrmont increased from 13,700 to 17,000, and is estimated to rise to 40,000 by 2021. New businesses include Channel 10 and Foxtel, advertising, and hospitality services.

In regard to heritage and cultural matters, the adaptive reuse of the Pyrmont wharves and wool stores, the Royal Edward Victualling Yards (REVY) and Defence Science Technology Organisation (DSTO) Buildings at Pyrmont, and the establishment of community centres at Pyrmont and Ultimo are all achievements of note.

Post Occupancy Survey

A number of post-occupancy surveys, undertaken as the project progressed, have provided feedback on the success of the urban renewal.
This information reflects the changes that have been effected in Pyrmont:

Figure 4: New apartment buildings overlooking Pyrmont Point

Figure 5: The Point, new residential development in Pyrmont Point

Figure 6: Pyrmont Point Park, a newly created harbour side park

- 34% of new residents are aged between 20 and 34 years;
- the percentage of residents aged over 40 years has increased from 15% to 29%;
- 26% of residents have no car, and 51% have only one car;
- 41% of residents walk to work; and
- 66% of residents listed lifestyle benefits as a key factor in their decision to live in Pyrmont.

Conclusion

Pyrmont has been a unique opportunity to renew an inner city neighbourhood. It has successfully built on the foundations of the existing community, accommodated the diversity of people's housing and employment needs and created a strong community sense of place.

Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority is proud of its role in the urban renewal of Pyrmont; a neighbourhood that meets the community's housing needs in the 21st Century, and complements the traditional housing of suburbia.

Figure 7: Joggers in Pyrmont Point Park

Figure 8: Café life in Pyrmont

Bob Deacon originally trained as a real estate valuer in the late seventies, and consulted to major financial institutions in the area of residential and tourist valuation and project management.

Moving into the State Government in the mid eighties, Bob worked on major infrastructure and property projects at Department of Public Works and Department of State Development before moving to Sutherland Shire Council in 1990. There he managed projects and property including the 'green fields' development of the Menai Town Centre and renewal of Sutherland Town Centre.

Bob returned to the State Government as Asset Manager of the City West Development Corporation for its urban renewal project of Pyrmont and Ultimo. Following the creation of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority in 1998, Bob was appointed Director – Built Environment responsible for the Authority's Heritage, Capital Works, and Statutory and Strategic Planning in 2001. Bob has recently been appointed the General Manager - Darling Harbour.

Suburbia on Steroids: The Loss of Regional Diversity

Mahalath Halperin

Abstract

In regional NSW, there are many small and medium sized towns struggling with the same issues as the suburbs of Sydney. Whilst the history of these towns from a planning view has often resulted in a well laid out central core, expansion of recent decades has seen the same uncontrolled sprawl as Sydney's outer suburbs.

'Colorbond City', row after row of brick veneer project homes divided with Colorbond fences, is not a unique phenomena to the big city. In towns and regional cities like Armidale, Dubbo, Ulladulla, Broken Hill, and even the back of Bourke, these same worrying suburbs are emerging. You can drive down the street of one of the 'suburbs' and quite literally not know where you are – they are all so similar, if not identical.

This 'disease' is worse when you venture further afield to areas of rural residential zoning. It's just more of the same, only bigger: Suburbia on Steroids, housing and streetscapes inappropriate to their location and climate. And in so doing, this spread is destroying the very fabric that makes such country towns so appealing in the first place. The attraction of character in the older-style houses, gardens and established trees in the landscape, and vistas across to the paddocks, bush or desert is being overwhelmed with city-style housing laid out in city-style streetscapes.

Such suburban sprawl can be seen to be having both negative and positive effects on regional Australia. Whilst the impact of increased building activity, denser populations and expanding townships may be a good thing, isolation from services, inappropriate housing forms, loss of the local ecology and potential new slum areas is hardly so. Somewhere there must be a compromise, allowing the growth of appropriate suburbs for larger regional towns and cities, but maintaining the identity and uniqueness of those towns. Even more so for smaller villages, where suddenly the 'suburbs' are bigger than the town itself.

Such issues need to be urgently addressed, through planning tools, community education and the building industry in general to ensure that the legacy we are building for our children is not one that they will not be able to identify from any other city suburb.

Nowhere in the brief for this conference does it say 'Sydney' Suburbia, or even 'City' Suburbia but the perception out there, is that the problems of suburbia only happen in the city. Even the Minister [The Hon. Dr Andrew Refshauge, Deputy Premier, Minister for Planning], while he spoke of many positive initiatives, only focused on Sydney issues. He talked of population growth, an ageing population and smaller household sizes. These are not just city-based problems. They are also problems needing to be dealt with in regional and rural communities, perhaps in different proportions, with different focuses, but they are still issues of suburbia and suburbia is not confined to big cities. With the recent name change of DUAP [Department of Urban Affairs and Planning] to 'planningNSW', I challenge the Minister to ensure that NSW doesn't just stand for Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong.

Colorbond® City

Many of us, unfortunately, are all too familiar with the Suburban brick 'venereal', sprawled out across the suburbs, a sea of tiled roofs and Colorbond® fences.

Figure 1: This could be anywhere in Sydney but it is on the outskirts of Dubbo, a large regional city in western NSW.

Figure 2: This scene could be any Sydney beach suburb however it is Yamba, a small coastal town of about 10,000 people on the north coast of NSW.

Figure 3: You can drive down the street of one of these suburbs and quite literally not know where you are - they are all so similar, you could be anywhere.

Figures 4 & 5: Martin Street Subdivision in Armidale, a town of 20,000 people, 1000 m above sea level, in north-west NSW.

Colorbond® City, row after row of brick and tile project homes divided with Colorbond® fences, is not a unique phenomena to the Big City. The perception is that it only happens in big cities like Sydney but in towns and regional cities such as Armidale, Dubbo, Ulladulla, Yamba, Broken Hill and even the back of Bourke, these same worrying suburbs are emerging.

As a result, the great diversity of regional NSW is slowly being swallowed up in brick and tile subdivisions.

Regional Diversity.

There has long been an 'us' and 'them' attitude towards big city living and non-big city living but the latter is as diverse in its density, form and needs as is one end of Sydney to the other. Despite the clichéd images of a 'country town' regional cities sport high-density apartments and villas. Regional towns might include rows of terraces and typical suburban sprawl, and smaller villages might have larger estates with only a single street of multistorey and commercial buildings interspersed with houses, terraces and units.

Perhaps what they all have in common, ironically, is their uniqueness within their own identity, style, climate and nature. That special something that attracts visitors and newcomers to a particular city or town or centre. It is that uniqueness that is in danger of being lost with the spread of suburbia. The very qualities that make regional and rural living attractive are being destroyed by poor development: in regional cities, towns, villages and beyond.

The stamp of generic subdivisions on individual communities ignores that very individuality. What is a problem in the metropolitan areas is becoming an even greater problem in areas of Rural Residential zoning: it's just bigger and more of it – suburbia on steroids.

There are several issues here-

1 The ability for growth and expansion within a regional or rural community, without loss of 'character' of place and identity;

2 The appropriateness (or otherwise) of suburban sprawl within a particular regional setting;

3 The appropriateness (or otherwise) of planning and design for Rural Residential zoning;

Growth & Expansion without loss of character

Whilst Sydney is almost famous for having grown without development control, spreading relentlessly in every direction bounded eastwards only by the sea, such unchecked growth in regional settings can destroy the very community that is trying to grow.

In terms of urban development, towns and villages are far less robust than cities, and more in danger of being absorbed in suburban sprawl. Larger scale developments around the edges of towns can sometimes dominate that town, and even destroy the central retail and business area, particularly when large residential subdivisions are coupled with even larger retail developments. A lack of connection and integration with the main centre of town can easily destroy the town. It could be said that it doesn't really matter in Sydney in a way, with its many almost independent regional centres within a massive infrastructure. Parramatta, Liverpool, Hornsby and other suburbs are effectively small cities in their own right, and yet they are all still well connected with road networks, rails and transport systems and so are still one big city. Not so in the bush.

Subdivisions on the edge of town usually have no public transport access, no retail or educational facilities, and everyone 'commutes' into town to work, shop and play; the very things they often left Sydney to get away from. The very nature of the village, town or regional city that is so desirable is soon lost and the purpose of 'living in the bush' is defeated. Where is the sense of 'place' amidst street after street of intrinsically identical houses, oblivious to their climate and culture.

When a developer takes a well-treed acreage, bulldozes the lot, and starts afresh with bare dirt, you may as well have stayed in Sydney, where the trees have sometimes already long gone. It somehow defeats the purpose.

Figure 6: A subdivision in preparation

The appropriateness of suburban sprawl within a particular regional setting

Whilst the houses and subdivisions being built in Sydney may or may not be considered appropriate (and that itself is a massive debate) my concern here is whether such development is appropriate in the bush. How can you take a Sydney house, designed for coastal, high density city living, and put it into a totally different climatic, demographic and social context?

The attention of character in the older-style houses, gardens and established tress in the landscape, and vistas across to paddocks, bush or desert is being overwhelmed with city-style housing laid out in city-style streetscapes. The great Aussie verandah, for example, developed out in the bush for a reason. It's often pretty hot out there. Houses in high altitude towns have airlocks for a reason. It's pretty cold in winter.

The house that does, for arguments sake, work in Sydney, with three bed, two bath, double garage, minimal laundry, open plan living and facing the street (because that's what everyone else does) is not going to work in a small coastal village, a hot town out west, or in a cold-weather climate. On the north coast, for instance, you need somewhere to dump the wet stuff, good cross ventilation ability, wide eaves to keep the rain off, and decent screens to keep out the mossies. Maybe the older houses aren't perfect but at least they acknowledge where they are.

In cooler climates, if the street is the wrong way, then you need to turn your house around so you can make the most of the sun for winter warmth and airlocks so you don't loose the heat when you open the door. Unfortunately,

Figures 7 & 9: Perhaps no architectural masterpieces, but more appropriate than the new alternatives.

Figure 9: A town where it snows most winters

Figure 10: Out west where it is hot and dry, shading is essential keeping out the dust and hot winds, whilst security screen doors, bars on windows and alarm systems might not be such a big issue.

these houses all face the view, due south, whilst their lovely sunny and warm toilets and bathrooms take up the northern side.

Houses need to work in the environment in which they are built.

may be a good thing, isolation from services, inappropriate housing forms, loss of local ecology and regional identity, and even potential new slum areas is hardly so.

In terms of development somewhere there must be a compromise. One that allows the growth of appropriate suburbs for larger regional towns and cities but maintains the identity and uniqueness of those towns. This is even more critical for smaller villages, where suddenly the 'suburbs' are in danger of becoming bigger than the town itself.

Figures 11 & 12: Coastal tourism developments

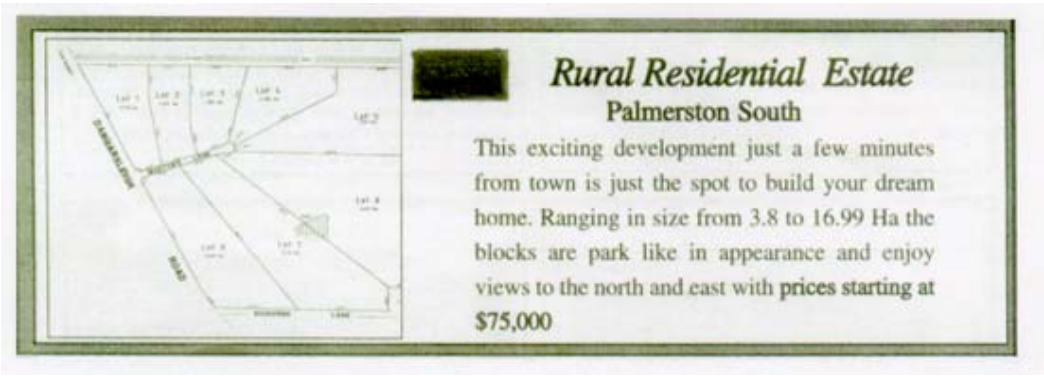


Figure 13: This plan could easily be a collection of 1/4 acre blocks, when in fact they vary from 10 to 40 acres.

How do we resolve these issues? On the one hand holistically rather than individually, yet with an acknowledgment that the solutions may be individual. Planning tools, community education and the building industry in general need to ensure that the regional legacy we are building for our children is not one that they will not be able to identify from any other city suburb.

We must retain regional diversity and identity. To do so, growth and development must be appropriate to the setting, and not simply lifted out of a city context and dumped in the bush. Planners must consider the region and its settings, architects and designers the climate and social demographics, and all must realise that positive progress and change can be achieved with cooperation, education and consultation.

That the city is not the coast which in turn is not the bush. That NSW stands for more than just Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong, and that people live in regional centres, towns, villages and hamlets, not just the urban sprawl that makes up the great City of Sydney.

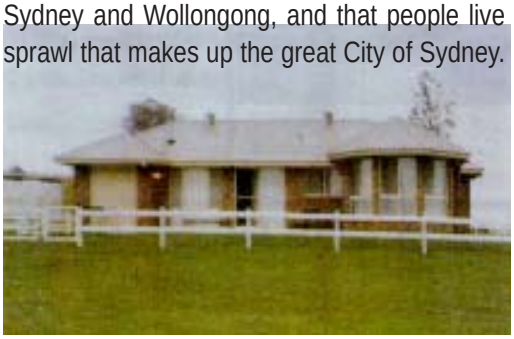


Figure 14: This house could easily be on a Sydney street, with its garage facing front, no relationship to the outside, and no acknowledgment of orientation and in fact it is set on 887 acres in hot humid northern NSW, 25 kms from the nearest town.

Figure 15: Making the most of the space but still inappropriate in its location.

Mahalath Halperin runs an award-winning architectural practice based in Armidale, north-west NSW, with a strong focus on ESD related issues. Working on both domestic and commercial projects, she travels throughout regional NSW, servicing a diverse culture of clients, organisations and communities. Active within the NSW RAIA Chapter and Country Division, assorted state government roles have also led to involvement with regional planning and needs, embracing not only the built environment but also business, economic and ecological issues. Mahalath Halperin has not only won many architectural and design awards, but also several Small Business awards.

Urban Consolidation: Sound Policy or Fad

Tony Recsei

Abstract

The policy of urban consolidation drives much of New South Wales planning. This policy imposes substantial changes on Sydney's environment, its inhabitants' way of life and heritage. Widely recognised effects include remnant bushland within the city being destroyed, medium-density units replacing diverse attractive homes and gardens and Sydney harbour's trademark sandstone rock-face and bushland being replaced by the glass and concrete facades of multiple units. Traffic congestion, overcrowding, overloaded infrastructure and increasing noise are becoming conspicuous.

In view of the fundamental effects of the policy it is pertinent that the underlying reasons be thoroughly explored. The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, which forces local government to implement development controls which give effect to the urban consolidation policy, makes no attempt to cite research which validates the approach. The author's investigations into benefits cited for urban consolidation indicate that they are either spurious or too small to be significant. In many local government areas elections have demonstrated a voter backlash against high urban density, to no effect as the State Government is imposing the policy by means of government edict. The question remains about what is driving this unpopular policy being enforced broadly against the wishes of local communities. There appear to be two broad causes.

The first appears to be a naive concept originating from academe rooted in the current 'Post Modernist' syndrome of thinking, in which it is claimed that any idea is as valid as any other, irrespective of the underlying facts. Simplistic apparent benefits of a suggestion can thus be accepted without practical rigorous analysis. The second policy driver is financial benefits. These benefits are claimed to accrue to the public sector but this claim does not stand up to analysis. However, financial benefits do accrue to private-sector organisations with strong links to government politicians or agencies. There is evidence that these organisations, some of which make significant contributions to political parties, are provided with a variety of opportunities to influence the planning policies of the State.

Shaping the future urban environment requires adequate research followed by a thorough planning process, in consultation with local communities. This should be coupled with significant power retained by communities to plan and conduct their affairs without undue interference from the State.

For this paper I wish to critically analyse government urban consolidation policy. We shall look at the implications for Sydney of the application of urban consolidation; State Government claims of its alleged benefits and what the evidence shows.

If our population has to increase we have two options. We could expand the city using proper planning for sustainability into carefully selected areas and preserve our open spaces, heritage and lifestyle. This expansion need only be very small as I shall show later. We could also repopulate selected depopulated rural areas. The second option is to squash us in closer together and inevitably destroy heritage and conservation areas, gardens and remnant bushland. The Government has chosen this latter path of increasing population density.

Visitors to Sydney from large centres overseas have commented on the beauty and relative spaciousness of the city. A policy of reducing this spaciousness by increasing population density needs to be very carefully examined to ensure that the result will not be detrimental. Higher densities make substantial changes to the environment in which we live and the way we live. At worst, we must not be creating future urban slums. During past centuries societies have struggled to escape the appalling consequences of overcrowding.

What are the Government's stated reasons for its policies? The Minister of Planning and his Department say society will benefit from high density policies in these ways:

- Improved traffic conditions and air quality;
- Saving of farmland and bushland;
- Less pollution;
- More housing choice;
- Saving of cost; and
- Improve community networks.

Let us look at the first claim. Planning NSW would have us believe that urban consolidation improves air quality and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Most people are under the impression that as density increases so does traffic congestion. However the Minister and the Director-General maintain the opposite will occur. Let us examine the facts.

Figure 1 shows the *increasing congestion* resulting from a higher density of people. From this graph of cities in the United States you can see that as persons per square mile increases, so does the roadway congestion index. I have looked at this relationship in Australian cities. The same trend is evident. The higher the density, the greater the congestion, just as we would expect.

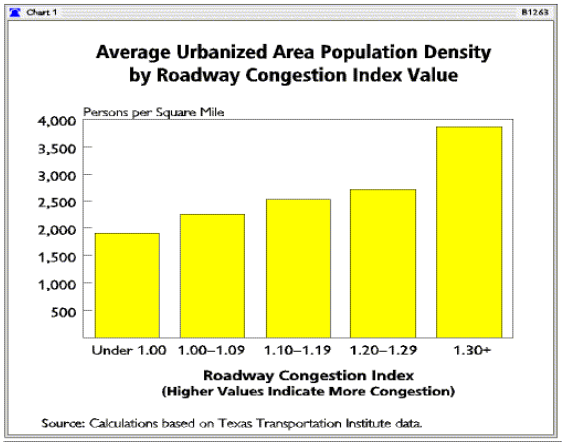
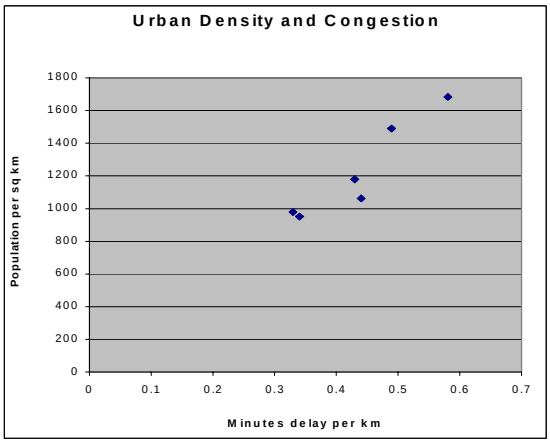


Figure 1: Increasing congestion resulting from increased population density[1]



From left to right: Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, Sydney

Figure 2: Australian City Traffic Delay[2]

More congestion in turn means greater energy consumption and more greenhouse gas emissions. Planning NSW claim urban consolidation has saved 320 million km travelled per year. I calculate that for the Sydney situation the claimed km saving in isolation is completely overshadowed by resulting additional energy usage.[3] With a denser population you have to consider the additional vehicle stops and starts and idling resulting from the increased congestion. This alone is likely to cause nearly twice as much energy consumption as any possible gain. There is also the energy used to make the steel and cement needed for the new multi-unit buildings, amortised over a 50 year life. This is much more than for conventional housing materials and also bear in mind existing dwellings are torn down. There is also the additional air-conditioning energy the new units will need. On a conservative estimate in the Sydney situation, instead of saving energy, higher density causes Sydney to consume 2.58 PJ more each year.

This is borne out by actual air quality measurements. The greater the population density the worse the air quality as is shown on the graph below, Population Density and Air Quality (Figure 3). Thus we are facing a higher population density; resulting in:

- more cars in an area;
- more congestion;
- more energy use;
- deterioration in air quality.

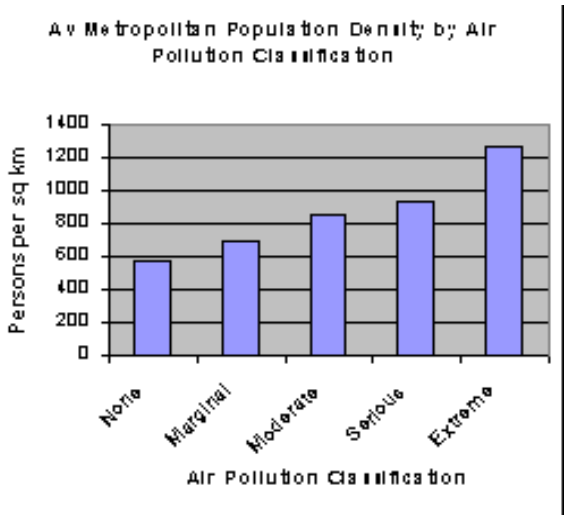


Figure 3: Population Density and Air Quality [4]

Where can one find a developed high-density city anywhere in the world with free-flowing traffic and good air quality?

Large European cities held up to us by some as examples to emulate in fact experience severe congestion. In many the average vehicle speed is only 20 km per hour. This is so even if they have high density living, no freeways and intensive rail transit systems. Contrary to what we are led to believe, more than 90% of private travel in these cities is in cars and increasingly so. And in Sydney, in spite of the high density policies that we have suffered from over the last 10 years, traffic continues to get worse. (Figure 4 - Sydney Transport Mode Use). Car use keeps on increasing more than the use of public transport. The unfortunate reality in our situation is that with increasing densities, expanded use of public transport is at best minimal. Public transport use does not counteract more car use where more people live. Therefore more cars overall.

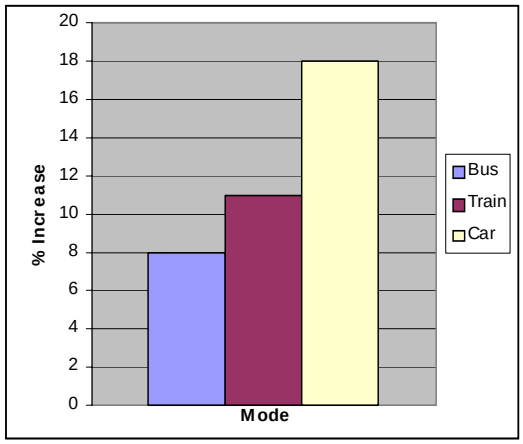


Figure 4: Sydney Transport Mode Use 1991 to 2000[5]

So much for the myth of improved air quality. The increased traffic congestion produces more pollution than any speculated saving. The higher the density, the worse the air we breathe. Let us move on to another myth. In public addresses the Minister has said that a consolidated city saves significant farmland and bushland. He maintains that urban consolidation we have suffered in Sydney in the last 10 years has saved 8,500 hectares of farmland and bushland. I mentioned earlier that this is a surprisingly minimal amount. Let me demonstrate.

A simple calculation shows that this area of 8,500 hectares amounts to a mere average of 700 metres on Sydney's 40 km diameter, the length of a couple of suburban streets. This low figure surprises many people. It results from the fact that residential areas comprise only 40% of a city. The rest, such as the CBD, airports and industrial areas are unaffected by density. If anyone wishes to check this out, I have a handout available that shows how this number is arrived at.

As a proportion of our vast expanses of bush, 8,500 hectares is infinitesimal. To put it into perspective, compare this 8,500 hectares to the area of 1.5 million hectares of bush on farms that was cleared in the same period. Remnant bushland pockets in the city are attractive to residents and visitors. They counteract pollution, purify the air, mitigate rainwater run-off, cool the city and provide a sanctuary for wildlife. These pockets are much more important to us than the effect of fringe farmland and bush moving another mere 700 metres average away from the city centre. We either expand the city by a very small extent in a sensitive manner or we squash everyone in closer together and destroy gardens and remnant bushland, heritage and conservation areas with a minimal saving in city dimensions. So much for saving bushland.

Time permits only a brief outline of the other myths. Higher densities result in increased noise levels. Increased densities with more concrete, tiles and bitumen result in less natural surface to absorb rain. This causes more polluted stormwater and more of it discharging into urban creeks and waterways causing significant degradation.

Then there is the housing choice claim. Planning NSW is forcing uniformly higher densities onto every municipality. This reduces diversity if every municipality ultimately has to look the same. There is growing evidence that we are experiencing a surplus of units and an increasing shortage of affordable homes suitable for families. Surely the highest priority should be given to families. Children are the key to our future.

We are told that the government will save money by the more efficient use of infrastructure if more people are forced into existing suburbs. But all that high-density is achieving is the overloading of existing infrastructure and decreasing our quality of life. Untreated sewage is overflowing into creeks, as is the case in overbuilt Willoughby and this will need tens of millions of dollars to rectify. Roads are disintegrating. Municipalities all over Sydney are now having to spend billions of dollars extra to try to dig up and upgrade inadequate infrastructure. They have had to increase their rates. Hospitals cannot cope with the increased populations surrounding them. Neither can the police.

The New South Wales government is not saving cost with urban consolidation. It is merely postponing essential expenditure. Our quality of life will plummet and the bill will ultimately amount to much more. The Minister of Planning tells us that high density enhances the involvement of people in community activities.[6] The facts indicate the complete opposite. People's community involvement in more spacious small towns is twice that in dense large cities. Also, community involvement is greater in low density suburbs than in denser central cities. This is especially true for the larger centres. To me, all this substantiates the commonly held viewpoint that as density increases, peoples' involvement in community activities *declines*.

And as community involvement declines antisocial behaviour increases. Since the 1970s Sydney residents groups have been commenting on increasing mental health problems and suicide rates and the correlation with high-rise living as one factor, which they called 'suicide towers'. Snap surveys performed by Save Our Suburbs, in the Parramatta and Central Coast areas, show that the issue that *most worries* people is creeping overdevelopment. This was followed by infrastructure not coping with increased densities; traffic congestion, rising crime rates and overcrowded hospitals.

In conclusion we must confront the question of why does the State Government have these high-density policies? All the available evidence shows them to be detrimental. Why cannot the beauty of Sydney's spaciousness be conserved and enhanced instead of being steadily destroyed? There seem to be three hidden underlying motives; unsaid drivers that lurk beneath the surface.

The first appears to be a naive concept originating from Social Science academe. A school of thought which is misleadingly called 'Post-Modernism' claims that any idea is as valid as any other. A superficially appealing fad such as an idealised high-density city is accepted without any rigorous analysis. Myths can be given preference to facts. This is not science.

Faddish thinking is not new. It reminds one of the story of King Canute commanding the tide to advance no further. Reality demolished the myth that the King was all-powerful. The Department of Planning New South Wales seems to be riddled with absurd fads. The current unsubstantiated fad is that high population densities are good. We are constantly fed this nonsense.

The second covert policy driver is real enough. It is financial benefits. For many decades developers have made huge profits. Political parties have received a share of the profits via campaign donations. Those of us who have been around for long enough know that this practice is absolutely entrenched. It is difficult to see how objective decisions can be made under these circumstances.

The third hidden policy driver is short-term expediency. By cramming people in, politicians can temporarily avoid spending money on infrastructure such as communications, health and crime prevention.

Summarising, our investigations show a huge divergence between stated policy motives and the actual results. Instead of saving any significant bushland the authorities are destroying open space in the city. Instead of improving traffic they are increasing congestion; instead of improving air quality they are worsening air quality. They are not saving infrastructure cost, the overloaded infrastructure has to be enhanced; Instead of increasing housing choice there will be less housing choice. Finally instead of improved community networks there is a breakdown of communities. They are not looking after the future of our children.

With urban consolidation, heritage must disappear. Historic homes occupy lands the government wants for higher densities. If reality does not correspond with the current fad, then we must have the courage to say so. To shape our future urban environment we need genuine research and proper long-term planning. The planning must be done in consultation with local communities. We must work at enhancing the beauty of Sydney. Otherwise that beauty will be lost forever.

References

1 Cox, W., '1999 The President's new sprawl initiative: A program in search of a problem' in *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No 1263, March 18, 1999

2 Delay from Road Facts, Ausroads, Sydney 2000, Density from Sustainability & Cities, Newman and Kenworthy, Island Press, Washington, 1999

3 Energy Balance: Petajoules per annum saved.

Alleged Saving	1.85
Additional embodied energy	-1.08
Additional heating and cooling	-0.54
Result of additional congestion	-2.81

Personal correspondence - Dept of Urban Affairs and Planning (25 January 2001)

Newman and Kenworthy, *Sustainability and Cities*, (table 3.15), Island Press, Washington, 1999.
Personal communication - Bureau of Transport Economics, Canberra.
Troy P, *Rethinking our Cities*, Australian Financial Review, 23 March 2001

4 Modified from Randall O'Toole, 'Dense Thinking', in Reason, January 1999 based on US Environmental Protection Agency data No 1263, March 18, 1999.

5 Data from Sydney Morning Herald 16 July 2001 reporting on Department of Transport figures

6 Deduced from Putnam R. D., *Bowling Alone*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000
Percentage of Community Involvement:
Central City and Suburb

Population	Central	Suburb
10,000 to 50,0000	17.60	16.91
50,000 to 250,000	15.76	17.17
250,000 to 1 million	14.44	15.99
1 million and over	8.19	12.86

Dr Tony Recsei is President Of Save Our Sydney Suburbs Inc, and is an environmental consultant. He has a B.Sc. Chemistry and Zoology from Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, a Masters degree in Eng. Sc. in Waste Management, and a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from University of New South Wales. Dr Recsei has a commercial pilot's licence, and is Past President of the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales. He is chairman of the Turramurra Zone Salvation Army Red Shield collection, and a committee member of Sydney Mozart Society.

Healthy Suburbs: Model Suburb Designs Prior To The Garden Suburb

Noni Boyd

Abstract

This paper looks at model suburb development in Sydney in the 1880s, suburbs planned and built before the Garden City movement come into being c.1900. A model for a '*healthy city*' was developed in the 1870s by a doctor, Benjamin Ward Richardson. Its concepts are embodied in certain subdivision and model suburb plans for Sydney designed by English trained architects in the 1880s. Richardson outlined his model in papers given in mid 1870s, noting that streets should be *'thoroughly ventilated, and in the day are filled with sunlight. They are planted on each side of the pathways with trees, and in many places with shrubs and evergreens. All the interspaces between the back of the houses are gardens...instead of the gutter even the poorest child has the garden'.*

Architects Walter Liberty Vernon, John Sulman and R. Howard Joseland emigrated to Australia in the 1880s, settling in Sydney. Each came in search of a warmer climate that would be more beneficial to their health or that of their families. Their designs for houses and hospital buildings reflect their concern with health and sanitation.

Vernon and Joseland won a design competition for the Kensington Model Suburb in 1889. John Sulman praised the design in the architectural press. This design, which was never built, incorporated themes that occurred in Vernon's previous suburban development in Wycombe Road, Neutral Bay. The design also embodies many of the ideas put forward by Dr. Richardson, and predates English Garden Suburbs such as Hampstead and model workers housing estates such as Port Sunlight, near Liverpool. Vernon and Joseland's competition entry was entitled *Rus in Urbe*, or Countryside in the Town. The title indicates that the two architects were aware of contemporary town planning theories.

The paper discusses surviving suburban development by Vernon, in Wycombe Road Neutral Bay as well Vernon and Joseland's entry into Kensington Competition. In addition it will look at how these ideas of a health suburb were incorporated into the model workers housing, designed following the 1900 outbreak of the plague, for the Rocks Resumed Area and Observatory Hill Lands (Millers Point).

One of the threads I have been following in researching a Ph.D. on the work of the NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon between c.1870 and his death in 1912 is his influence on the design of model suburbs and housing in NSW and this paper will concentrate on two surviving groups of buildings in Sydney: the residences built on the Neutral Bay Land Company Estate in Neutral Bay and model workers housing built within the Observatory Hill Resumed Lands.

The Neutral Bay Estate is model suburban middle class housing, dating from the late 1880s. Model workers housing was constructed within the Observatory Hill Resumed Lands: The Rocks and Millers Point, following the successive outbreaks of Bubonic Plague that commenced in 1900. The involvement of the English trained architect Walter Liberty Vernon who, in 1890, was appointed Government Architect of NSW is the common bond between these two groups of buildings.

A number of English trained architects immigrated to Australia in the 1880s. These men generally came to Australia for reasons other than to further their career. For some the cold wet English climate was detrimental to either their health or that of family members. A change of climate was recommended. Walter Liberty Vernon and John Sulman immigrated to Sydney. Howard Joseland tried both Auckland and Melbourne before settling in Sydney.

These ex-patriot architects continued to design in a similar manner to their previous work in England, introducing a new architectural vocabulary to Australia, drawn from the English Domestic and Queen Anne revivals. The new palette of materials introduced to Sydney included terracotta tiles, roughcast and face brickwork. Terracotta tiles were used for 'tile hanging', with flat unglazed 'plain tiles' employed vertically. These flat tiles could also be used for roofing, as were the more commonly used curved *marseille* tiles. Roughcast or *harling* is a form of external render containing pebbles to provide a texture, which was usually whitewashed.

The work of these English trained architects in Australia also indicates a thorough knowledge of contemporary developments in England in the design of model housing, model subdivisions and civic planning. John Sulman in particular is credited with the establishment of the discipline of town planning in Australia. Vernon's work, which complemented that of Sulman is less well known.

Their work in improving the urban environment of Australian towns and cities was based on contemporary English and American ideas. These ideas were soon to be taken up by the City Beautiful Movement in America and the Garden City Movement in England. Vernon, Sulman and Joseland's initial work in Australia was based on the same early prototypes that influenced these movements.

The forerunners of the garden suburb in England took two forms. The first was model workers housing constructed by philanthropic factory owners such as William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight, across the Mersey from Liverpool and George Cadbury at Bourneville near Birmingham. The second prototype was middle class housing, built on a speculative basis by developers, subdividing the estates around the major metropolitan areas such as London and Cardiff.

Bedford Park

Bedford Park, near Chiswick just outside London is hailed as the first garden suburb. More recent studies have observed that the suburb was in fact constructed in the 1870s as a purely commercial development. The quality of the built environment was strictly controlled, and continues to be so to this day. Three different architects were employed; Maurice B. Adams, Edward Godwin and finally Richard Norman Shaw. The Bedford Park subdivision popularized the Queen Anne Revival style for middle class residences and the designs were widely published in English and American architectural periodicals. The suburb became something of a tourist attraction, for architects, architectural students and the general public.

Caerleon

This Queen Anne Revival soon spread to the English colonies. The earliest example of a Queen Anne Revival style house in Sydney is generally thought to be *Caerleon* in Bellevue Hill. A local architect Harry Kent designed the initial layout of the villa in 1886. The house was then adapted into a fashionable Queen Anne Revival style residence by the London based architect Maurice B. Adams and has similar characteristics to the houses he designed at Bedford Park. Many of the components of the house had to be imported, including metal casement windows, terracotta tiles for the vertical tile-hanging, for the roof and paving.

The house is still standing. Whilst this may be the first domestic use of the revived English vernacular technique of tile hanging in Sydney, it may not the be first house design to be inspired by the work of Adams, Godwin and Norman Shaw at Bedford Park. The Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) Register notes that the design of *Caerleon* was *avant-garde* for its time. No such detailed evaluation has occurred for the buildings of the Neutral Bay Estate, designed by Walter Liberty Vernon c.1887, contemporary with the construction of *Caerleon.*

Walter Liberty Vernon had been designing residences clearly influenced by Richard Norman Shaw whilst in private practice in Hastings on the South Coast of England.[1] On arrival in Australia in 1883 Vernon set up an architectural practice, designing residences and small scale commercial buildings using motifs drawn from the work of Norman Shaw and his own detailed studies of vernacular English and French buildings.

His designs included his family residence *Penshurst* at Neutral Bay (which was demolished in the 1960s to make way for a block of flats) and *Hestock* at Hunters Hill, which survives. Vernon's drawings of his designs were published in the local architectural periodicals. These designs are very important because they show the introduction of contemporary English architectural trends to Australia. I am still trying to determine the extent to which Vernon imported materials for use at *Penshurst.* His family connections, with Liberty's of London, meant that he could decorate and furnish his own residence with fashionable de Morgan Tiles and William Morris fabrics.

Neutral Bay Estate

Vernon then joined William Wardell in practice and began to work on a larger scale, on projects including the model subdivision for the Neutral Bay Land company. He aimed *' to develop and maintain what will undoubtedly be the model and favourite suburb for families with moderate means, but desirous of pleasant surroundings*.'[2]

The Neutral Bay Estate, as it was known, was laid out behind Vernon's own house *Penshurst*. The majority of the residences of the first stage of the subdivision lined Wycombe Road and part of Shellcove Road and Harriet Street. The subdivision was later extended further west.

The majority of the houses in the Wycombe Road section of the estate were completed before 1892 and appear on the block plan of the suburb held in the Stanton Library. The Neutral Bay Estate also included facilities which were both social and aimed at introducing healthy pursuits. A church and a tennis court were planned for the

Estate however the church and rectory are later buildings, not designed by Vernon. The Neutral Bay Land company subdivision survives today, albeit with alterations to the density and in some cases form of the building.

Vernon combined aspects of English prototypes such as Bedford Park and local villa typologies, adopting in particular the verandah facing the sea. The verandah was however used in English Queen Anne houses, particularly those built at the seaside, using turned timber rather than cast iron and in large villas on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Both styles of house survive within the estate, the Queen Anne Revival, and more conservative houses, marking the transition from the eclectic Victorian styles to what was to become the Federation style.

During the nineteenth century many of the estates of the wealthy landowning families around the major English cities were subdivided for middle class housing. The estate architects were responsible for ensuring control of the architectural quality, protecting the investment. The residences were leasehold not freehold. Vernon's Neutral Bay Estate was established in this manner however the use of long-term leases was not favoured in Australia and the properties are now freehold.

Walter Liberty Vernon's illustrations for the Neutral Bay Land Company prospectus show the initial intention of his designs. A survey of the houses today shows that many of the features of the individual houses do survive, albeit with paint covering the face brickwork and roughcast.

Two houses *Bovington*, No. 66 Shellcove Road and *Tendring*, on the corner of Wycombe Road and Harriet Street are particularly important surviving examples, indicating the introduction of Queen Anne Revival motifs to NSW in parallel with Adam's *Caerleon*. *Bovington* is substantially intact externally, retaining its roughcast finish to the first floor, brick detailing and its unpainted face brickwork to the ground floor.

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) listing card, prepared by Clive Lucas in 1979, noted that the house was substantially intact internally and externally and that it was an early use of the Queen Anne Revival in Sydney. *Bovington* is the only house of the first stage of the subdivision, dating from the mid 1880s, to retain its face brickwork and roughcast unpainted.

A comparison between Vernon's drawing of *Tendring* and the current form of the house shows that *Tendring* retains its elaborate gables and brick detailing although the roughcast and the face brickwork have been painted. *Bovington* and *Tendring* clearly show two of the main features of the designs of the villas of the Neutral Bay Estate. Like the Bedford Park prototypes there were no unhealthy lower areas, cellars or basements where servants lived and worked. The verandahs were all designed to face the water rather than the street, to take advantage of the healthy sea breezes.

Walter Liberty Vernon's suburban development PREDATES the descriptions of ideal suburban housing written by William Morris in his Utopian view of the future of London. '*News from Nowhere*' , a play on the title of Thomas Moore's Utopia was published in installments in 1890. Morris describes his vision for London, noting that

> *'the soap-works, with their smoke vomiting chimneys were gone, the engineers works were gone, the lead-works gone…'*[3]

In their places

> *'Both shores had a line of very pretty houses, low and not large, standing back a little way from the river, they were mostly built of red brick and roofed with tiles and looked above all, comfortable, and as if they were, so to say, alive and sympathetic with the life of the dwellers in them. There was a continuous garden in front of them, going down to the water's edge, in which the flowers were now blooming luxuriantly, and sending delicious waves of summer scent over the eddying stream*.'[4]

and

> *'There were houses about, some on the road, some amongst the fields with pleasant lanes leading down to them, each surrounded by a teeming garden. They were all pretty in design, and as solid as might be, but countrified in appearance, like yeoman's dwellings, some of red brick like those by the river, but more of timber and plaster…'* [5]

The surviving residences of Vernon's Neutral Bay Estate are significant for both the individual designs and the layout of the suburb. They demonstrate the introduction of utopian ideas in suburban planning, the provision of 'pleasant surroundings' advocated by William Morris. They also retain evidence of a their 'healthy' layout, in particular the verandahs and principal rooms facing the sea breezes, and as well as evidence of Vernon's experimentation with more traditional Sydney villa forms.

Vernon's villa designs also mark the introduction to Sydney of the palette of materials and motifs that would be widely used in the Federation Style, a style which characterises the harbour suburbs of the Lower North Shore: Neutral Bay, Cremorne, Mosman and Clifton Gardens. Their use is however English in origin. The significance of this group of buildings should be re-evaluated before further buildings are lost or altered beyond recognition.

The current level of significance, as scheduled on the North Sydney Local Environment Plan (LEP) for these buildings is Regional for the Wycombe Road houses and Local for *Bovington*. I would argue that this is somewhat

inadequate. Greater consideration of the international, and national, context within which these suburban houses were constructed and built is required. In particular their place in the development of housing in the late nineteenth century in Australia should be clearly established, as they are most certainly not typical Federation houses.

Rus In Urbe

Vernon went on to design a model suburb adjacent to the recently completed Centennial Park. His first prize winning design, was undertaken with his new partner, Howard Joseland and a firm of surveyors, Mocatta and Oxley. The design was named *Rus in Urbe*, or *Countryside in the City*. The title indicates the philosophy of the designers and draws from contemporary theory regarding city planning and model suburb layout. Due to the depression in the early 1890s, it was not constructed, as it required substantial investment in infrastructure prior to the dwellings being constructed.[6]

The Kensington Model suburb was designed in 1889, well before the publication of the Ebenezeer Howard's book on the garden suburb, and shortly before the construction of Hampstead Garden Suburb in London. John Sulman in discussing garden suburbs in the Studio Magazine in 1913, after Vernon's death commented, that

> *'So far but little has been attempted in Australia on these lines. Adelaide is noteworthy for its parklands and fine squares, and Melbourne for its broad tree planted main avenues, while all the capitals possess open spaces near the centre of the cities, used as botanic gardens or parks. These are a distinct advantage; but in the suburbs, except for the occasional park or reserve, but little has been done.*
>
> *Some twenty odd years ago an enterprising syndicate offered premiums for the laying-out of an area of land at Kensington, near Sydney, and the winning design showed features that were a great advantage on anything so far attempted. But the time was not right and financial stringency intervened, so that the area was cut up in the usual chequer board fashion to screw the last penny out of the estate. This attempt at better things should not, however be forgotten'*.[7]

The Healthy City

A model for a *'healthy city'* was developed in the 1870s by a Benjamin Ward Richardson, the founder of the *Journal of Public Health and Sanitary Review.* His model of a healthy city included

> '*low-density development, mass transit, ample parks and gardens, reliable water and sewage systems, health-conscious residents (who do not smoke or drink alcohol), and community health centers*'. [8]

Many of Benjamin Ward's concepts are embodied in the subdivision and model suburb plans for Sydney designed by English trained architects in the 1880s. Their concern for providing healthy environments was both personal and professional.

Richardson outlined his model in a paper written in 1876 noting that streets should be

> *'thoroughly ventilated, and in the day are filled with sunlight. They are planted on each side of the pathways with trees, and in many places with shrubs and evergreens. All the interspaces between the back of the houses are gardens ... instead of the gutter even the poorest child has the garden.'* [9]

Sanitary Reform

Concern with healthy dwellings and suburbs was not a new theme introduced by the expatriate architects. Rather it had been much debated in Sydney from the 1850s onwards. In the mid nineteenth century there was much local concern about the rapid development of Sydney against their overcrowded slums and pollution. Those who could afford to built large residences away from the city centre, initially building on the points of the elevated ridges projecting into Sydney Harbour: Dawes Point, Ultimo/Pyrmont, Potts Point and Darling Point.

Following the construction of the railway suburban development followed the railway line, with substantial dwellings built in suburbs such as Strathfield and Ashfield and on the upper North Shore, suburbs such as Normanhurst. Sulman, Vernon, Joseland and the Engineer Norman Selfe all moved to Normanhurst in the mid 1890s, where they could erect large family homes surrounded by extensive gardens far away from the crowded inner city suburbs they were seeking to redesign.

Slums were a problem in English cities and also a problem in the rapidly expanding Australian cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Poorly ventilated terraces, with inadequate drainage, and substandard construction could be found in the inner ring of suburbs surrounding Sydney. The terrace form is not inherently unhealthy, rather there was a large range of standard of construction, number and size of windows and room size.

The ideas of sanitary reform developed in England were soon experimented with in Sydney. One of the reformers, William Stanley Jevons had in fact spent some time in Sydney in the 1850s recording the conditions of the 'slums' within walking distance of his residence in Charlotte Place (now Grosvenor Street). Sydney's slums were considered by Jevons to be equal to those of London.

In Sydney inspectors condemned unsanitary and unsafe buildings. However the provision of model workers housing did not really occur until after the outbreak of the plague in 1900. Those concerned with the redevelopment of Sydney included the engineer Norman Selfe, John Sulman and Walter Liberty Vernon.

Staff Residences

Vernon's concern with the provision of healthy and pleasant residences can be seen in the staff accommodation designed for institutions across New South Wales. These residences, like his earlier suburban villas, were based on contemporary English designs and utilised English vernacular detailing. The semi-detached residences for the staff in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, for example, would not look out of place in either Port Sunlight or Bedford Park. They are of a building form not commonly employed in Sydney in the late nineteenth century, being two storey semi-detached houses. The tile hanging and roughcast, which are English vernacular details, are utilised as they would have been by contemporary suburban designs. In this case however there is no accompanying garden suburb, merely the Botanic Gardens with its collection of picturesque gate lodges and staff residences, largely selected from architectural pattern books.

During Vernon's term as government architect residences were no longer constructed within the institutional complexes, such as mental hospitals and gaols. Rather the staff lived adjacent to the institution, in layouts that clearly reflect contemporary garden city and suburb planning. Such housing survives at the Waterfall Sanatorium, now Garrawarra Hospital, Cumberland Hospital and Rozelle Hospital (now partly the Sydney College of the Arts).

Model Workers Housing

Vernon's influence on the design of model housing was to continue into the Twentieth Century. In his role as Government Architect he gave evidence to the 1909 *Royal Commission on the Improvement of Sydney* and its suburbs and he served on the City Improvement Board. More importantly he oversaw the designs prepared by the Government Architects branch for the model workers housing within the Observatory Hill resumed lands, an area of land which included The Rocks and Millers Point.

The outbreak of bubonic plaque in Sydney provided the government with a good excuse to resume all of the land north of Charlotte Place (now Grosvenor Place). Ostensibly this resumption was to allow for the rebuilding of the wharves to prevent further outbreaks of the plague. It was also to allow for future large scale public works, in particular the construction of a harbour bridge.

The Government Architect's Branch recorded all of the substandard dwellings in The Rocks. These drawings and photographs survive in the Mitchell Library. All timber buildings were demolished, as were large numbers of small scale rubble walled buildings. Well constructed masonry terraces such as Susannah Place in the Rocks, which contained adequate sanitary provisions and some degree of fire separation were retained and leased.

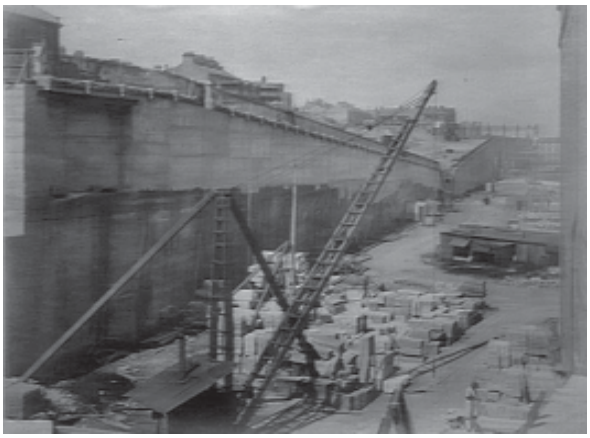
The responsibility for the provision of workers housing within the Observatory Hill Resumed Lands was transferred from the newly created City Improvement Board to the Sydney Harbour Trust in June 1901.[10] The Board continued to be involved in the preparation of model housing schemes, presenting a scheme for the redevelopment of Windmill Street to the general public in May 1902. [11]

The schemes for model workers housing to replace the substandard dwellings were prepared by the Government Architects branch under Vernon. The first model dwellings to be constructed were the row in Windmill Street, which are specifically referred to in the Public Works Department (PWD) Annual reports as model housing.[12] The City Improvement Board had studied overseas examples of workers housing however none of the models studied '*would meet the requirements of the colony and a completely new type of flat had to be designed to cater to the needs of the residents*'.[13] The model workers housing constructed in the Rocks and Millers Point continues to be public housing today having been transferred to the Department of Housing.

Following Vernon's retirement the design work for the model housing was handed over to George McRae and then William Henry Foggit of the Housing Board. The surviving drawings in the State Archives show that Foggit developed the earlier schemes prepared by the Government Architects branch.[14] A range of dwelling types were constructed on the Observatory Hill Lands. High density multi-storey units, terraces, shops with residences above and boarding houses were constructed.

One of the most interesting groups of dwellings lines High Street, two long terraces with a central children's playground. Additional smaller units occur where High Street turns the corner. The row is not in fact comprised of terraces houses, rather they are flats, occurring on one level. An external staircase provides access to each pair of first floor flats. John Sulman used this playground as an *'interesting example…which was provided by the Harbour Trust as the adjoining cottages have no backyards'*.[15]

The surviving drawings of this group of houses were prepared by the Engineering Department of the Sydney Harbour Trust in 1910.[16] It is likely that the design is based on a scheme prepared by the Government Architects Branch under Vernon, as occurred for the majority of the model workers housing in the area. One of the significant features of the High Street group is the central children's playground, which originally contained a shelter shed and toilets. A bridge over Hickson Road gave access to the waterfront buildings. Another unusual feature was the use of concrete floors to separate the upper and lower units, concrete being a material that is both fire and vermin proof.



High Street ML GPO 1 Still 10001

New Dwellings for Waterside Workers ML GPO 1 Still 10006

ML GPO 1 Still 10010

Windmill Street Terraces

ML GPO 1 Still 10014

The Terrace ML GPO 1 Still 10265a

High Street and the Munn Street Bridge ML GPO 1 Still 10235

Children's Playground, High Street ML GPO 1 Still 47209

Lance Children's Playground, Illustration for Sulman's 1921 Book ML GPO 1 Still 10250

Palisade Hotel ML GPO 1 Still 10312

Windmill Street ML GPO 1 Still 30606

Initial heritage assessments of The Rocks and Millers Point listed the workers housing for its streetscape value. These buildings are also very important for their internal planning, aiming to provide a healthy environment for workers. Laundry and bathroom facilities were all confined to the rear of the buildings and very well ventilated. These facilities were completely separate from the remainder of the dwelling and access could not initially be gained internally. Garbage shoots were also included. A yard area for drying clothes was provided, in the case of the upper units on the roof. Improvements in sanitation have resulted in modifications to the layout of the kitchens and bathrooms, with internal access being provided. Originally the cooking must have been done in the living area. Other than these modifications the dwellings remain substantially intact, and are still used as public housing.

Conclusion

In conclusion the importance of the design work of the NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon lies not only in his use of a new palette of building materials in NSW, continuing his work in England and Wales. The surviving smaller scale public buildings and model housing designed by the Government Architects branch under Vernon, demonstrate that he, and his staff, kept up to date with contemporary architectural design and theory at an international level.

It is important to consider Vernon's designs for both model workers housing and suburban villas in terms of the international context in which they were designed and built. The significance of their planning, detailing and technological advances, as well as the utopian ideals they embody, should not be underrated and the designs mark a conscious effort to improve the standard of residential dwelling in Sydney.

Both Vernon's suburban development at Neutral Bay Estate and the model workers housing at Millers Point were planned to be healthy environments. Neither should be viewed as typical Federation designs, rather they show the adaptation of current architectural ideas, predominantly from England, to suit local environmental conditions, by a highly skilled architect. To conclude, and to repeat John Sulman's words regarding his friend and colleague Walter Liberty Vernon: *this attempt at better things should not, however be forgotten.*[17]

References

1 Moroney, Peter, 'Walter Vernon, A Change in the Style of Government Architecture', in Smith, Terry and Bradley, Anthony (editors) *Australian Art and Architecture, Essays Presented to Bernard Smith*. Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 46-47

2 *Prospectus of the Neutral Bay Land Company 1889*, Stanton Library Local Studies Collection.

3 Morris, William, *News From Nowhere*, p. 48, Penguin, London, 1998

4 Morris op. cit. p. 48

5 Morris op. cit. p. 61

6 Proudfoot, Helen, 'Founding Cities in Nineteenth Century Australia', in Hamnett, Steven and Freestone, Robert, Editors, *The Australian Metropolis, A Planning History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000 p. 25

7 Sulman, John, 'Town Planning and Garden Suburbs', in *The Salon*, 1913, pp. 19-25.

8 Lund, Vanessa, *The Healthy Communities Movement: Bridging the Gap between Urban Planning and Public Health* http://www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings99/LUND/LUND.HTM

9 Richardson. Benjamin Ward, *Modern Sanitary Science, A City of Health*, reprinted from *Van Nostrand's Eclectic Engineering Magazine*, 14, January 1976, refer to http//www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/rich'son.htm

10 Kass, Terry, 'A Socio-Economic History of Millers Point', unpublished report for the Department of Housing, May 1987, p. 48

11 Daily Telegraph, 3 May 1902

12 PWD AR, 1907/08n Government Architects summary, p. 4 *In connection with the 'Rocks' Resumptions the Department during the year erected 32 model dwelling houses in Windmill Street and 9 in Upper Fort Street..*

13 Kass, Terry, op. cit. p. 48

14 See AO Plans 2953 – 2976, AO Plans 2979-2985, X3303 Architectural Plans and Drawings of Buildings AO Plans 2987-3157, X3304-3309

15 Sulman, John, *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*, NSW Government Printer, Sydney, 1921, p. 140

16 AO Plan 2958 Workmen's Flats, High Level Road, Miller's Point, 1910
AO Plan 2965 Diagram Plan, amended elevations, 1911
AO Plan 2966 Diagram Plan and Elevations – Workmen's Flats, High Street Millers Point
AO Plan 2979 Amended Elevation, Workmen's Flats, High Street, Millers Point

17 Sulman 1913 op. cit.

Argyle Street ML GPO 1 Still 10024

Hickson Road ML GPO 1 Still 19423

Noni Boyd is a Conservation Architect, she is a member of the Historic Buildings Committee of the National Trust and is currently undertaking a Ph.D. at RMIT in Melbourne. Her topic involves a study of the contemporary influences on the work of the former NSW Government Architect Walter Liberty Vernon.

From Cobra Grubs to Dragons: Stories of Australia's Most Culturally Diverse Suburbs

Tanja Dreher and Paul Graham

Abstract

Fairfield City is Australia's most culturally diverse Local Government Area. More than half Fairfield's residents were born overseas, coming from over 130 different countries. Fairfield continues to be a destination for a high proportion of Australia's new arrivals.

A history of migration is inscribed on the urban landscape of Fairfield. From the Darug name of Cabramatta to Chinese market gardens, the slab hut, the Serbian Orthodox Church to some of the largest Buddhist temples in the southern hemisphere, buildings and places reflect Australia's multicultural history. In the absence of clearly formulated policy on planning for diverse communities, Fairfield residents have adapted and transformed architectural styles and public spaces. Fairfield's unique urban landscape develops organically as cultures meet and mingle. This paper explores the contributions of diverse communities in creating a unique suburban landscape.

Fairfield City is Australia's most culturally diverse Local Government Area, and a history of migration is inscribed on it's urban landscape. From the Darug name of Cabramatta to Chinese market gardens, a slab hut and a Serbian Orthodox Church to some of the largest Buddhist temples in the southern hemisphere, buildings and places in the Fairfield area reflect Australia's multicultural history. In the absence of clearly formulated policy on planning for diverse communities, Fairfield residents have adapted and transformed architectural styles and public spaces. This unique suburban landscape develops organically as cultures meet and mingle.

In September 2001 Fairfield City Council and the Migration Heritage Centre of the NSW Premier's Department launched a self-drive audio tour of the Fairfield LGA, 'Tune in to Fairfield City: a multicultural driving tour'. This cultural tourism initiative is intended to showcase the contributions made by diverse communities in shaping Fairfield's urban landscape. The tour was developed against the background of a complex politics of representation. Sydney's western suburbs are rarely represented in mainstream media and cultural productions, and when they are, they are usually defined as lacking in 'culture' and resources.[1] In contrast, the suburb of Cabramatta in the Fairfield LGA is a household name, primarily due to media reporting of 'Asian gangs' in 'Australia's heroin capital'.[2] The suburb is also well known for cheap restaurants and shopping. All of these representations position Cabramatta as foreign, exotic, alluring or dangerous and essentially 'Vietnamese'. This paper introduces the concepts and strategies that informed the production of 'Tune in to Fairfield City' in an attempt to produce a more complex representation of Cabramatta and Fairfield. By reading the urban landscape we have tried to position Fairfield's cultural diversity as an ongoing process of cultural exchange which is vital to our understanding of Australian multiculturalism more generally.

Fairfield City Council: 'celebrating diversity'

Fairfield City Council has as its slogan, 'celebrating diversity'. It is a strap-line that the Council wears proudly. The Council takes great pride in the local population of approximately 190,000, with over 50% of residents coming from a non-English speaking background.

As a local government in a constantly changing, diverse local community it is important that the Council is able to reflect and respond, particularly around issues of citizenship and belonging. Recently, one of the questions the Council has been asking is, if 'celebrating diversity' is our catchcry, then how do we do this? And is what we do to celebrate diversity working?

A lot of consideration was given to choosing 'Celebrating Diversity' as a strapline, presenting a positive image of Fairfield that reflects a sense of the place and pride in the people that live in the area. The use of language was an important consideration: 'celebrate' is meant to demonstrate that Fairfield rejoices in its diversity, implicitly transcending lesser aims like tolerate or accept. The wider message is, 'celebrating diversity is the way to achieve the goal of a socially cohesive Fairfield'.

For Fairfield City Council, celebrating diversity has been used as a way of achieving social cohesiveness. The word 'celebration' is synonymous with ceremonies, festivals and events, commemorations and other public activities. The visual appeal and dynamic nature of these celebrations provides a theatre in which different communities are exposed to opportunities for cultural maintenance and display. The annual Moon Festival, Fairfield Festival of the Arts, the Asia for a Day Program and the Bonnyrigg Festival are a few of the activities Council is involved in to celebrate diversity. Most of these activities focus on food and dance, traditional costumes, music and performance.

While these festivals have attracted a lot of interest, the question remains, is the way Fairfield celebrates cultural diversity working, or is it achieving the aim of social cohesion? Anecdotal evidence suggests that the different groups that have participated in celebrations have enjoyed sharing their culture with the crowds, and also with other performers or artists. These opportunities for cultural exchange create a sense of pride in place and people, which must make a contribution to a socially cohesive society.

Also, many people have been attracted from and to the area to watch Fairfield's multicultural festivities. For the large audiences, the activities are experienced as performances observed behind barriers rather than as opportunities to participate in cultural production. As a spectacle, these festivities often portray the differences between specific cultures, for example through dance, music and food. Indeed the showcasing of these 'exotic' elements is the very reason that these types of festivities draw a crowd. The question for Council is whether festivities based in spectacle and offering relatively few opportunities for interaction and participation are contributing to the social cohesion aim of the 'celebrating diversity' slogan.

Focusing on the exotic may give an impression that there is something unreal or less than permanent about cultural diversity. What else does a multicultural society have to offer other than great food and traditional performances?

A further reason to question the ability of festivities as spectacle to achieve social cohesion is their presentation of different cultures as the 'other'. The Day Trip to Asia program of activities provides a good example.

The Day Trip to Asia idea was introduced to celebrate Cabramatta's difference. A series of activities like festivals, food trails and night markets were established to portray a positive image of Cabramatta, so often demonised in the media for its problems, not its assets. The potential for The Day Trip to Asia program to attract tourists to the area and to increase economic activity were seen as ways to assist Cabramatta to overcome its problems.

For all its good intentions however, this branding of Cabramatta as 'Asian' has in some respects reinforced the negative perceptions held by some in the community. Indeed, most of the negative perceptions in the community focus on the 'Asianisation' of Cabramatta, and the Day Trip to Asia program only served to reinforce these negatives. By continuing to focus on the 'other' and concentrating on our differences, there is a risk that we create and maintain a perception of 'them and us' that is far removed from the goal of social cohesion.

There are many positive aspects to the ways in which diversity has been celebrated in Fairfield. We have come along way, yet there is a need to reflect and refine ways in which we celebrate diversity if social cohesion is the goal.

Mapping the Fairfield suburban landscape

Driving through Fairfield City immediately reveals the ways in which multiculturalism has affected the built environment. Early European, Middle Eastern and more recently Asian settlement have had great influence on architectural styles. In the sixties the landscape was dominated by simple fibro dwellings, often decorated with carefully manicured gardens and accessories such as birdbaths and garden gnomes.

Many European migrants moved to western Sydney to acquire the great Australian dream of a house on a quarter acre block. As both a symbolic gesture that they had achieved a great deal as migrants to this country, and to fill the need for space for large families, the Europeans built double storey houses from red and white brick. Many had columns holding up second stories and large gates flanked by brick pillars adorned with lions or other animals.

Interestingly, many of these dwellings have become a hybrid of architectural forms introduced by each phase

of migration. European style double storey houses have more recently been acquired or built by families from South East Asia. Some feature elaborate wrought iron gateways, not with lions but dragons and lotus flowers sitting atop gate pillars. Even old fibro houses have been customised with golden incense burners and red silken banners hanging from front verandahs.

The changing nature of the built environment as a result of migration has also placed a demand on local planners. The role of the planner is one of spatial police person: deciding who can do what where, and even when. Planners thus have a pivotal role in negotiating these spaces, making them safe and imprinting new identities on them.[3] Among other things, this has included determining what types of renovations or development are permissible.

Although by sheer weight of numbers migrants coming into the area have advanced the need for flexibility, and those demands have gone a long way to reshaping the City, there is a long way to go. For a number of reasons, this flexibility has been reactionary rather than proactive. Planning laws in Australia are still derived from white, Anglo American/Anglo Celtic male dominated cultures, and although some changes are being made, these cultural values still shape the curricular in our universities. The anxieties of the 'old communities' is reflected in attempts to counter the advancement of a new mix of cultures projecting itself on the landscape by voicing objections, which can often be complicit with planning laws.

While the ethnoscape in Fairfield clearly indicates that planners have been flexible, as the migrant population continues to grow there will be an increasing pressure on planning to develop a 'multicultural literacy more attuned to cultural diversity, and to redefine and reposition planning according to these new understandings'.[4]

The built environment provides an excellent document of the history of migration to Fairfield City. It communicates a sense of the everyday, its foundations and bricks and mortar symbolically imparting the longevity of migration, how strongly multiculturalism is embedded in the life of the City. In that way the built environment is the polar opposite of Council's celebratory activities.

Although these multiple layers of Fairfield's cultural heritage are interesting documents of migration to the City, their use as a medium for 'celebrating diversity' was hard to imagine. As well as the variations to residential dwellings, many migrant groups have established places of worship, shops, clubs and community centres that serve specific communities. During the 1970s and 80s, the State Government in NSW responded to requests by a number of new and emerging communities to build places of worship and community centres by allocating them large parcels of land on long-term leases.

The elaborate architecture of these ethno specific sites, public access and the myriad of stories behind their construction were the impetus behind creating a tour that portrayed or 'celebrated' migration to Fairfield in an alternative way.

Tune in to Fairfield City

'Tune in to Fairfield City – a multicultural driving tour' is an audio tour by CD or tape of 17 sites that capture the nature of the area. Using the physical structures and stunning architectural elements as departure points 'Tune in to Fairfield City' takes you on a journey of cultural change from the Aboriginal people of the Darug Tribe, through to Buddhist Temples and the highlights of Cabramatta. 'Tune in to Fairfield' is about cultural exchange, creating opportunities for interaction between individuals, groups and communities, aiming for further understanding and celebration of cultural diversity.

The Fairfield City Cultural Tour audio CD represents stories of the Fairfield-Cabramatta area which are very different from those which circulate in the mainstream media. The self-drive tour provides information on seventeen sites associated with Fairfield's many ethnic and religious communities. Mosques, temples and churches are described in interviews with community representatives. The following discussion focuses on several key themes that informed the research and production of the tour. These themes are highly relevant to how we understand the urban landscape and everyday life in Australia's culturally diverse suburbs more generally. They reflect our attempts to move beyond some of the limitations of representing cultural diversity through festivals and performance discussed above.

The key themes are: migration heritage, everyday multiculturalism, the place of Indigenous experiences and Anglo-Celtic culture in representations of multiculturalism, the concept of places as 'intersections' or 'meeting places' and a focus on cultural exchange.

Migration heritage and a migration timeline

The tour quite directly highlights the historical contribution by different ethnic groups in the establishment and nature of suburbs. Fairfield residents have adapted and transformed architectural styles and public spaces, creating a unique

urban landscape that develops organically as cultures meet and mingle. So, in a sense, a history of migration is inscribed on the urban landscape of Fairfield where buildings and places reflect Australia's multicultural history.

Figure 1: Holland House, Smithfield

The tour represents an implicit timeline of migration. Each site is presented as a concrete representation of the changing phases of Australia's multicultural history. This timeline begins with the Darug name of Cabramatta, moving on to the Fairfield Museum and the history of British colonisation and white farming settlements, then telling the story of the Chinese market gardens, followed by churches built by the Italian, Croatian, Russian and Serbian communities, and finally visiting some of the largest Buddhist temples in the southern hemisphere. This history is summed up in the title: From Cobra Grubs to Dragons.

Western Sydney is a region of great historical significance to Australia: for its Aboriginal history which extends back tens of thousands of years; for its importance in the history of the development of agricultural and industrial production in the nineteenth century; and as an area of massive post-war urbanisation and immigration.

Many people who have settled in Fairfield have brought with them cultural heritage which is thousands of years old. As communities have established religious buildings and meeting places, centuries-old architectural traditions have been adapted to the Australian context. The significant places in Fairfield's urban landscape are lively places for cultural maintenance, social services and community interactions.

Fairfield's multicultural history goes back to the relationships between the Cabrogal and neighbouring Aboriginal peoples, and early contact with British colonisers. Fairfield has played a significant part in our nation's history, as the new home for many of the country's migrants and refugees. In the 1800s Chinese-Australians developed market gardens, and were soon joined by the early German winemakers and then migrants from the Balkans, France, Poland and Italy. The migrant hostels in the Fairfield and Liverpool districts were the first homes in Australia for many World War II refugees. In more recent decades the area has diversified further with the arrival of refugees from South East Asia, East Timor, China, Chile, El Salvador and the former Yugoslavia.

Significantly, many of these stories of migration are specifically refugee stories: many of the most distinctive buildings in Fairfield's urban landscape were built by people fleeing persecution in post-war Europe and seeking asylum from more recent wars in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The tour highlights the contributions to Australian culture and the urban landscape made by those who have sought asylum here. For example, the Most Venerable Phuoc Hue, a highly respected Buddhist leader, was sponsored to enter Australia from a Hong Kong refugee camp, and now leads the community of monks at the impressive Phouc Hue monastery and temple complex at Wetherill Park

Figure 2: Phuoc Hue Buddhist Monastery, Wetherill Park

Everyday multiculturalism

The 'Tune in to Fairfield City' tour reflects an interest in 'everyday multiculturalism' as discussed in the work of Ghassan Hage[5] and Jon Stratton.[6] Stratton describes everyday multiculturalism as syncretic and rhizomatic, a process by which:

> *cultures, produced by individuals in their everyday lives, merge, creolise and transform as people live their lives, adapting to and resisting situations, and (mis)understanding, loving, hating and taking pleasure in other people with whom they come into contact.*[7]

Both Hage and Stratton stress processes of mundane interaction and cultural exchange. For Hage, the multiculturalism of daily interaction and migrant home-building experienced in Sydney's western suburbs, including Cabramatta, is contrasted positively to the cosmo-multiculturalism of consumption based in Sydney's inner city.[8]

Everyday multiculturalism is not so much about 'ethnic' restaurants and foreign films, rather it is about interaction, interdependence, hybridisation and cultural exchange. It is the daily mix and fusion of all cultures, which occurs in suburbs such as Fairfield and its neighbouring suburbs. To give just one example: the Lao Temple Wat Prayortkeo Dhammayanaram is also a significant community and cultural centre for ethnic Chinese East Timorese people, and the temple representatives are proud of the fact that all of their children have married outside the Lao community

'Tune in to Fairfield City' is intended to encourage cultural exchange and understanding. To achieve this we aim to showcase Fairfield as a positive and exciting example of everyday multiculturalism. The tour highlights the sites and Fairfield's many communities as lively and changing, and stresses intercultural interactions and adaptations as much as cultural maintenance.

The many stories inscribed in the urban landscape of Fairfield provide a window on Australian history and cultures and the changing faces of Sydney. There are stories of resistance and survival, of celebration and adaptation and above all stories cultural mixing in Fairfield's many communities. This is the living face of Australian multiculturalism, where diverse cultures and experiences meet and adapt, and traditions are maintained and evolve.

Anglo culture

The representation of British-derived culture is central to our interest in everyday multiculturalism which seeks to complicate the core-periphery model of cultural diversity reflected in much official policy on multiculturalism. So where much of the media and many of our institutions represent Australian culture as consisting of an Anglo-Celtic core with peripheral 'ethnic' add-ons, in Fairfield's urban landscape Anglo culture sits alongside many other cultures and traditions. British-derived culture is central to Fairfield's history, but the suburbs development and future is decisively shaped by interactions across a wide range of cultures.

In the tour this aspect of Fairfield's history and development is best represented by St John's Park Anglican Church. St John's Park was a central area in the Old Orphan School Grant which was granted by Governor King in 1803. The church of St John's dates back to 1914, when St John's Park was an isolated rural area. Cattle, vineyards and orchards were the main farming activities. The small wooden Church stood on this site for more than 70 years before being replaced with the modern building you see today. Today St John's Park Anglican Church hosts a multicultural congregation, and services are held in Vietnamese and English. Thus even this building, which is visually rather uninteresting, has a story to tell about the history and diversity of Fairfield.

Indigenous experiences

We have also very deliberately incorporated Aboriginal history and contemporary Indigenous experiences in the tour. This decision reflects a desire to expand the interest in Fairfield's cultural diversity beyond a well-established focus on 'ethnic' communities in the area. While there are good reasons why there has been a long standing separation of multicultural and Indigenous discourses in Australian cultural politics,[9] it is important to acknowledge and represent the contributions of Indigenous Australians in shaping the urban landscape of our suburbs.

The tour includes a brief stop at Clear Paddock Creek, where numerous stone artifacts have been found. The Darug traditional owners of the area fished and collected cobra grubs along the creek. In fact, Cabramatta takes its name from the Cabrogal band of the Darug-speaking people that lived around Liverpool and Fairfield for thousands of years. The Cabrogal name comes from the *cobra* or *cabra* grub, an edible freshwater worm that breeds in submerged wood. A birthing site and ancient gathering places have also been identified along Clear Paddock Creek, and there is increasing evidence that the Fairfield area was a meeting place for several clans in the surrounding area.

Today the Fairfield suburb of Bonnyrigg is the centre of a significant Indigenous community. Fairfield's contemporary Koori community still reflects the concept of a meeting place, as Wiradjuri, Gamilaroi, Bundjalung and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from around Australia have come to live in the area. The more visible signs of this Indigenous presence include the many murals on local school buildings and community centres.

Intersections and meeting places

The tour also reflects an interest in suburbs as 'meeting' places or 'intersections'. This concept derives from the cultural geographer Doreen Massey, who argues that places are not homogenous, bounded entities, but rather each place is a particular, unique point of intersection of social relations and communications.[10] Places are always porous and defined by interaction and social relations – thus definitions of place will be constantly changing, and open to contestation.[11] Places are not static locations, rather we create space and place through our interactions.[12]

This complex and multi-layered conception of place informs the 'Tune in to Fairfield' project. Following Massey, Fairfield is seen as a 'meeting place'[13] where people, communities, cultures and representations connect and disconnect and space is socially created through interactions. The tour highlights Fairfield's great diversity, rather than focusing on any particular, bounded community. For example, where Cabramatta is often assumed to be a 'Vietnamese ghetto',

Figure 3: Pai Lau Gate in Freedom Plaza, Cabramatta

the tour tells the story of the famous Pai Lau gateway in Freedom Plaza, which was built as a symbol of multiculturalism and community harmony.

The Cabramatta CBD is a bustling centre for shopping, community celebrations, tourism and cultural activities. It is also an area where many languages are spoken and where diverse cultures and communities meet and mingle. At the centre of this area is a three metre ornamental gateway or Pai Lau. Bold letters spell out Liberty and Democracy in Chinese, Vietnamese, English, Khmer and Lao scripts. As many Cabramatta residents arrived in Australia as refugees, community representatives wanted a tribute to Australia's democratic lifestyle. The traditional ornamentation of the Pai Lau also features sculptures of kangaroos and koalas as a symbol of cultural exchange and integration.

The tour also tells stories of interaction and cooperation between communities, and highlights the fact that many of Fairfield's places are actually shared spaces. For example, the diverse nature of the congregation of Mount Carmel Church was pioneered by Italian immigrants, who established market gardens in the Fairfield area during the 1950s and 60s. During the massive arrival of new immigrants to the area in the 1960s and 1970s, the Mount Carmel congregation grew and was strengthen by Spanish, Croatians, Filipinos and Yugoslavs who originally found accommodation at the nearby Cabramatta Migrant Hostel.

The places showcased in the 'Tune in to Fairfield City' tour are also meeting places in the literal sense. Many of these places of worship and community centres have links well beyond the Fairfield area, and several inscribe Fairfield in transnational and diasporic flows of tourism, migration and popular culture.

While the Phuoc Hue Buddhist Monastery was established by the Vietnamese-Australian community, the temple is very keen to expand its activities and links with other communities. Teachers from Burma, Taiwan, England, the United States, China, Thailand and many other centres have visited the Temple. Monks from nine brother temples visit regularly. The Phuoc Hue has also become an important site for celebrations of Peace and multiculturalism. During 2000 a 'Prayer for Peace' ceremony brought together the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laos communities in Fairfield. Tibetan monks have performed a blessing ceremony at the temple, which also hosted a mass citizenship

ceremony for the 50th anniversary of the Citizenship Act. The Temple also hosts religious and political leaders including the Dalai Lama, Venerables from around the world, Prince Charles and representatives of every level of government.

Cultural exchange

Linking all of these key concepts is a focus on cultural exchange. The tour focuses not only on traditions and history, but also on cultural adaptation and processes of change. The tour aims to highlight links and cooperation between community groups, such as the annual inter-faith 'Prayer for Peace', or the multilingual slogans on Cabramatta's famous Pailau Gateway.

The tour reflects a complex and dynamic conceptualisation of suburbia, heritage and multiculturalism. It places migration at the centre of our understanding of Fairfield, but in a way which emphasises cultural exchange and adaptation as much as attachment to homeland or cultural maintenance. This is a Janus-faced conception of migration heritage, looking both forward and backwards. It positions migration and cultural diversity as central to Australia's past, and also a key ingredient in Australia's future.

This emphasis on cultural exchange is perhaps seen best in the story of that famous Australian phrase, 'fair dinkum'. The remains of a Chinese market garden in Smithfield are used to tell the long history of Chinese migration to Australia. During the Nineteenth century Chinese people arrived in Australia as indentured workers. During the Gold Rush of the 1850s and 1860s thousands of Chinese flocked to the goldfields of Victoria and NSW. They actually gave rise, it is believed to that most Australian of expressions, 'fair dinkum' - chin kum means real gold in the Toi Shan Cantonese dialect. So even the quintessentially 'Aussie' phrase 'fair dinkum' derives from a Chinese goldminers' expression for 'real gold'.

This tells a story of cultural adaptation and intercommunal interactions, where the 'Australian', 'host' culture is changed by migration and cultural diversity as much as migrating cultures adapt to new surroundings. The story of 'fair dinkum' represents a long history of Chinese presence and inter-cultural interactions in Australia and foregrounds hybridisation and complexity in a context of cultural tourism and heritage which often focuses on essentialising categories.

This reading of Fairfield's urban landscape tells a story which is relevant to how we understand Australian culture, heritage and suburbia more generally. It suggests that contemporary Australia is built on contact between peoples. Australian culture is made as different communities meet and mingle. Culture is shared and developed in our daily interactions, making Sydney one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. Migration links Australia to the world. Stories and histories have intertwined during colonisation and resistance, through trade and family relations, in diaspora, through study and above all through myriad everyday interactions in schools, at work, at home or in shopping centres and at bus stops.

This conception posits migration heritage as an ongoing process of re-inventing traditions and communities. When people move, so do languages, ideas, religions, traditions, philosophies, cultures and arts. By sharing these stories of home-building we can better understand ourselves and others. Migration is central to Australia's past, present and future. It shapes who we are. In reading the urban landscape of Fairfield, we can better understand the challenges and the possibilities of cultural diversity in everyday life.

'Tune in to Fairfield City – a multicultural driving tour' is a partnership between Fairfield City Council, Migration Heritage Centre, Premier's Department NSW and the many communities that agreed to tell their stories and share their cultures.

References

1 Powell, D., *Out West* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993

2 ibid & Dunn, K., 'The Vietnamese Concentration in Cabramatta: Site of Avoidance and Deprivation, or Island of Adjustment and Participation?' *Australian Geographical Studies* October, 31 (2), 1993, pp 228 – 245 & Dunn, K., 'Rethinking the Ethnic Concentration: The case of Cabramatta, Sydney' *Urban Studies* vol 35, no 3, 1998, 503-527

3 Sandercock, L., *Towards Cosmopolis* John Wiley and Sons, West Sussex England, 1998 p.16

4 Sandercock, p.16

5 Hage, G., *White Nation* Pluto PressHage, 1998

6 Stratton, J., *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis* Pluto PressStratton, 1998

7 Stratton (1998: 15)

8 Hage, G., 'At home in the entrails of the west' in *home/world: space, community and marginality in sydney's west* eds H Grace, G Hage, L Johnson, J Langsworth and M Symonds Pluto Press Sydney, 1997, 99-153.

9 cf Curthoys, A, 'An Uneasy Conversation: multicultural and indigenous discourses' in *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism* ed G Hage, The Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1999 pp 255 - 272

10 1994: 154

11 ibid: 121

12 1996: 32

13 Massey, D, 1996 'The Spaces of Community' in *Annotations 1: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, edited by Nikos Papastergiadis, Institute of International Visual Arts, London, p33

Bibliography

Curthoys, A., 'An Uneasy Conversation: multicultural and indigenous discourses' in *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism* ed G Hage, The Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1999, pp 255 - 272

Dunn, K., 'The Vietnamese Concentration in Cabramatta: Site of Avoidance and Deprivation, or Island of Adjustment and Participation?' *Australian Geographical Studies* October, 31 (2), 1993, pp 228 – 245

Dunn, K., 'Rethinking the Ethnic Concentration: The case of Cabramatta, Sydney' *Urban Studies* vol 35, no 3, 1998, 503-527

Hage, G., 'At home in the entrails of the west' in *home/world: space, community and marginality in sydney's west* eds H Grace, G Hage, L Johnson, J Langsworth and M Symonds Pluto Press Sydney, 1997, 99-153.

Hage, G., *White Nation* Pluto PressHage, 1998

Massey, D., *Space, Place and Gender* Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1994

Massey, D., 'The Spaces of Community' in *Annotations 1: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, edited by Nikos Papastergiadis, Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 1996, pp. 30-37

Powell, D., *Out West* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

Stratton, J., *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis* Pluto Press, 1998

Sandercock, L., *Towards Cosmopolis* John Wiley and Sons, West Sussex England, 1998.

Figure 4: Serbian Orthodox Church

Home Improvement: Suburban Works-in-progress

Joanna Besley

Abstract

Do-it-yourself, home improvement, renovation and decorating are quintessential suburban pursuits. Australian suburbs are a testament to the will of households to individualise their homes in a variety of ways and to greater and lesser degrees of conformity and eccentricity. Home improvement is one of Australia's favourite leisure pursuits, sustains a significant manufacturing industry and a massive consumer market - its prominence in popular culture in undeniable.

Yet, home improvement has been largely ignored in architecture and associated fields. Indeed, home improvement is often considered as a violation of the integrity of original architectural intention by architects and heritage practitioners. Conservation practice is often about dismantling accretions rather than trying to understand their meanings. However, the ability to change and modify the house has always been a major attraction for the many Australians home-owners who live in the suburbs. The home improvement efforts of households contribute significantly to the character and identity of our suburbs. Consider for example, the distinctiveness of particular migrant enclaves. Closely entwined with ideas about home, self and family, home improvement is inscribed with meaning at many levels.

This paper offers comment on the development of home improvement activities in Australia, the USA and Britain, with particular reference to the housing of postwar Levittown in New Jersey, which was constructed with the suburban compulsion toward home improvement firmly in mind. It is argued that the nature of houses as 'works-in-progress' should be taken into account in discussions about what we value about suburban environments.

Like many aspects of the suburbs and suburban life, home improvement activities have been largely ignored within architecture and associated fields. Suburban pursuits and aesthetics have been rejected in turn as conformist, bland, gratuitously materialistic and environmentally profligate. Leading the crusade in the early postwar period was architect Robin Boyd who was relentless in his fierce and critical scrutiny of Australian suburbia. Home improvement did not escape his acerbic attention. He wrote in *Australia's Home* in 1952 '*for half a century, Australia has taken it for granted that every man deserves his own house and should be able to shape it in some special personal way*'.[1] He condemned the embellishment of a 'typical' Australian suburban house as 'psychopathological featurism', describing it thus:

> *The house which is featured in the suburban cul-de-sac is itself a gift-box of features: the living room thrust forward as a feature of the façade, a wide picture window as a feature of the projecting wall, a pretty statuette as a feature in the picture window, a feature wall of vertical boards inside the featured living room, a wrought-iron bracket holding a pink ceramic wall vase as a feature on the feature wall, a nice red flower as a feature in the vase*.[2]

To Boyd, the efforts of homemakers were an intensification of the tendencies he criticised in his key concept of 'featurism', a national fixation with unnecessary decorative features. Yet, the ability to change and modify the house has always been a major attraction for the many Australians living in the suburbs. Do-it-yourself, home improvement, renovation and decorating are quintessential suburban pursuits. Australian suburbs are a testament to the will of households to individualise their homes in a variety of ways and to greater and lesser degrees of conformity and eccentricity. Home improvement is one of Australia's favourite leisure pursuits, sustains a significant manufacturing industry and a massive consumer market. Its prominence in popular culture is undeniable.

Consider the plethora of prime-time television programmes, mostly voyeuristic in nature, creating drama in everything from bidding at an auction to scraping paint off an old wardrobe. Then there is the huge variety of house and garden magazines whose content ranges from practical, how-to tips in buying, selling and renovating houses to fetishistic connoisseurship of designer products and interiors. Lifestyle sections increasingly encroach upon the 'heavier' content of newspapers. Real estate, it is claimed, '*is the most titillating subject of our times*'.[3] The internet is the newest

realm for the proliferation of house-related information with hundreds of sites, some as simple as a technology-savvy handyman passing on precautionary tales to other do-it-yourselfers. In Australia, houses persist as privileged objects of the popular imagination, from Art Union tickets to IKEA dioramas and display homes. Home improvement is central to this preoccupation with the house. It operates as both an expressive personal pursuit and a cultural phenomenon, functioning within a highly complicated framework of cultural practices and values and social, economic and political structures.

Scale of Home Improvement

Expenditure in the home improvement market is equivalent to 70% of the national value of new dwelling commencements. In 1992, 2.84 million separate and substantial projects took place. By 1997 this had risen to 4.5 million projects. Prior to the introduction of the First Home Owners Grant (FHOG), expenditure in the home improvement market was increasing whilst expenditure on new dwellings was falling. For example, in the December 2000 quarter in Queensland, the last quarter before the introduction of the FHOG, spending on home improvements rose by 12%, whilst new housing work fell by 20%.[4] As long as Australian tax policies continue to favour the family home as a tax-free investment, the home improvement market will no doubt continue to flourish.

At various times, people find themselves unavoidably immersed in home improvement. It seems to be a condition of certain stages of life, making personal changes to a house recently purchased, preparing for the arrival of a new baby or aged parent. Closely entwined with ideas about home, self and family, home improvement is inscribed with meaning at many levels. It is consumption, leisure and recreation but is also work-like and productive. All members of the household may take part in these activities and participation rates are almost equal for men and women. A 1997 time-use survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that on average, Australian men spend three hours each week on home and grounds maintenance and women spend half an hour each week. Women also spend an average of an hour each week on handiwork and crafts, some of which is likely to be related to home furnishing or decorating.[5] Home improvement is an activity undertaken by all types of households and is not the province of the middle class alone. Financial analysts BIS Shrapnel have found that 40% of Australian households engage in at least one significant home improvement project each year. These projects are not merely small decoration and repair jobs, this figure accounts for projects such as re-cladding or re-guttering through to additions and renovations with an average cost of $25 000[6].

For many people, home improvement is simply something they enjoy doing, a leisure activity or hobby. Hours are spent researching and searching for the elusive home improvement solution, this effort matched only by the 'sweat equity' of then doing-it-yourself. The aim of many home improvement projects is to add value to the household's most significant financial investment. Paradoxically, it is quite likely that the enhancement of market value of the house is not commensurate with the cost of many of these projects. In fact, some changes, if sufficiently idiosyncratic, may have a negative effect on the market value of a house. Several years ago, a friend of mine overheard a very heated argument going on between his neighbours, a young Italian couple who were trying to sell their house. *'You've done it up all wrong' the wife yelled at the husband, 'no one wants houses like this anymore, they want colonials'*. He had renovated their old timber house, taking an approach that is pretty standard for Italian households in our suburb: he'd enclosed underneath the high-set house with bricks and put in car-parking and a second kitchen downstairs, concreted the front yard, erected a large and impressive fence with concrete balustrades and installed ornate steel security screens over the windows and doors. Obviously, lack of interest on the part of prospective buyers willing to pay a price that would cover the cost of these extensive modifications was the source of the argument.

Given the scale of home improvement activities and markets in Australia, it is surprising to discover that it is an under-researched area. There has been little attention paid to home improvement within the fields of architecture, social history or sociology. The majority of research is geared specifically towards the manufacturing and supply industries, the information is quantitative not qualitative and there have been few attempts at broader interpretation of wider personal or social meanings. Obviously lacking is specific historical investigation, whilst there has been some historical work undertaken on do-it-yourself elsewhere (notably the USA), in Australia these activities have received only sideline attention. My aim in this paper is to provide some historical perspective on the fascination, some would say obsession, with home improvement and do-it-yourself activities in contemporary Australia. How did undertaking practical work and remodelling the house take on a self-conscious character over the period of the twentieth century to become such a prominent feature of Australian domestic life and consumer culture?

Development

The growth of home improvement and do-it-yourself is decisively bound to the pattern of suburbanisation and in particular, the growth of widespread home ownership. Other social and cultural factors were also critical to its development. Most notable was the evolution of the modern nuclear family and gender roles within the household, the development of home-based technologies, changes in the style and spatial arrangement of the house, garden and domestic interior, the growth of media specialising in advice and taste-making as well as the efforts of domestic reformers, professionals and experts, the expansion of a variety of home improvement industries and the regulation of working hours which instituted the suburban weekend. Historical investigation reveals the changing meanings of home improvement across the twentieth century, with the home emerging as a crucial space where the competing and contradictory demands of modernity are worked out in the lives of ordinary people and where modern notions of self and identity are enacted. Unlike the moment of purchase where the commodification of housing looms large, the process of home improvement is arguably the time and space of 'the great Australian dream'.

An argument could be made that home improvement is simply the suburbanisation of much older Australian rural building methods which relied on the creative use of materials, make-do techniques and routine additions and alterations to what were cheap, ad hoc dwellings on farms and in mining areas. As many of the earliest settlers of the bush were squatters, they had few choices but to construct makeshift dwellings for themselves, given the lack of any local building industry and the tenuous nature of their land tenure. Miles Lewis traces a tradition of 'making do' back to the processes of land selection that took place across the colony from the 1850s onwards. In order to retain their holdings, selectors were required to make improvements to their property. Without money to purchase materials or hire labour, selectors tended to undertake the work themselves, utilising materials they found on their land (hand-hewn and split timber, earth construction and so on) and using rudimentary building techniques brought from their countries of origin.[7] The majority of male migrants who came to Australia in the nineteenth century were manual workers, with a basic competency in most aspects of building construction. As Tony Dingle points out - 'they were literally handy in a way that is no longer true; consequently, using their hands to build a house was an extension of a familiar activity.'[8] Women did what they could to make these rough dwellings conform to contemporary notions of homeliness. Dorothy Roysland recalls her wallpapering efforts in the family home near Renmark, South Australia around the turn of the century:

> *On another occasion when Mother was away I planned to paper the bag walls of our house. I brought out a pile of old newspapers and mixed up a bucketful of paste made from flour and water, and I was ready. When all the walls were covered I gave them time to dry out, and then I stirred up a mixture of water and red ochre to use as paint. I added a handful of flour so that it would stick to the paper and not rub off, and then I painted the colour all over the walls with a brush so that it covered up all the newsprint. It dried a lovely pink, and looked very fine. Mother was delighted with it.*[9]

It is likely that urban settlers at this time were also manually skilled, however, urban conditions were not always so conducive to people building their own homes, not the least being that a majority of the urban population were tenants. Also, as Kerreen Reiger points out,

> '*despite the significance of rural myths in Australian culture, the major frame of reference for the household has been the city and the suburbs*'.[10]

From early on, Australians embraced the suburbs. Cheap and available land, affordable building materials and inexpensive methods of building construction, public transport networks, comparatively high wages and low unemployment meant that many Australian households were able to buy houses in the burgeoning suburbs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For working class families, do-it-yourself home improvement was probably a case of necessity and it could be that their manual confidence and dexterity contributed to their willingness to take up home ownership. Blue collar workers who knew how to use tools had everything to gain by working on and improving their own homes. However, it appears that middle class suburbanites in the nineteenth century were not so likely to do it themselves. Even those in modest circumstances usually hired professionals to undertake the smallest home repair or improvement. The separation of work and home that had come with suburbanisation had also segregated men and women into distinct spheres of competence and influence and it was usually the women who supervised and directed the servants and hired-help who worked on the house. Industrialisation had broken the traditional connection that many men had with the use of heavy tools and self-sufficient practices. Now, they worked in shops and offices and when they came home from work, middle class, suburban men wanted to rest and retire or leave the house to pass their leisure time in fraternal company. Indeed, distance from manual work was a more significant aspect of their self and class definition.

American historian Steven Gelber describes how the appearance of Mr Fixit around the turn of the century was part of a gradual transformation of the role of men in the changing structure of the modern family. In fact he argues that men's engagement with tools and home improvement was a '*critical component…in the metamorphosis of the restrained and distant Victorian father into the engaged and present suburban dad*'.[11] By taking on building and maintenance jobs around the house, men created a place for themselves in the emerging modern family and the domestic space of the home, so much so that by the 1950s, do it yourself was virtually essential to the definition of suburban husbanding.

One of the earliest calls for Mr Fixit was made by Harriet Beecher Stowe, who with her sister Catharine Beecher, had written the classic American household advice manual *The American Woman's Home* in 1869. In an article of the same year called *The Handy Man,* she called on the home-owning husband to become a '*handyman who knows how to use every sort of tool that keeps his house in order*'.[12] It is not surprising that it was a woman who made this call, considering the effort it took to maintain the prevailing standards of cleanliness and presentation of the home. The Victorian cult of '*the respectable 'cleanly' wife*'[13], together with the contemporary aesthetic preference for heavily draped interiors cluttered with furniture and decorative objects meant household management was a complex and exacting occupation. The content of late nineteenth century Australian manuals indicate that many women were intensely involved in home furnishing and decorating tasks. Mrs Wicken, author of *The Australian Home: A Handbook of Domestic Economy* of 1891, advised her readers how to construct 'a cosy corner' in the drawing room:

A carpenter can make a deal bench to fit or it can be made of some packing cases. If the latter, remove the lids and stretch sacking across. Make some broad cushions and cover them with pretty cretonne and a valance of the same. Flute the cretonne on the wall about three feet above the seat as far as it is extended. Border it with ball fringe, or a shelf may be put up and painted with enamel and used for books or ornaments. A Japanese curtain draped on the wall above completes the whole.[14]

In providing these options, it is clear that Mrs Wicken was aware that her audience included both those who could afford to employ a carpenter and those who needed to innovate in order to achieve the levels of fashion they desired in their homes. Another publication of the era, the *Thrift Book*, explicitly instructed readers how to undertake tasks such as wall stencilling, providing ready-drawn designs and advice about colour schemes.[15]

None of these publications implied that women were undertaking home decorating for their own satisfaction and enjoyment. Advice was heavily invested with a moral tone and gender roles were explicitly spelt out. As Mrs Beeton counselled:

> '*men are so well served out of doors - at clubs, hotels and restaurants - that to compete with the attractions of these places, the mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as the arts of making and keeping a comfortable home*'.[16]

Home was promoted as the natural place for women and housewife, the most worthy of occupations. For men, the home was a retreat from the industrialised world and for children, a sanctuary where their moral and civic development was nurtured. Advice manuals also reflect how the principles of scientific management and faith in the application of modern technology were being extended into the realm of the home.

The period from 1880 to the Second World War saw dramatic changes in the material and cultural context of everyday life in Australia. Integral to these changes was a re-configuration of domestic space that fostered the emergence of the ubiquitous twentieth century suburban home. Transformations in the physical space of the home were part of a larger change in the relationship between people and their homes of which do-it-yourself home improvement was an integral aspect. The middle class Victorian practice of decorating the home with a profusion of decorative objects clearly signals how household objects were becoming symbolic of individual and class identities. A souvenir brought back from a seaside holiday indicated to visitors that the household had the means for ritualised leisure and recreation, a painting by the mistress of the home not only showed that she had leisure time but that she was a woman of artistic sensibilities. Taste was not perceived simply as an issue of personal sentiment or preference, as Mrs Wicken cautioned in respect to fashion, it must not be out of step with '*what is suitable to our position in society*'.[17] Another early indication of how the home was increasingly being seen as a reflection of personal and social identity was in Reverend G.H Stanley's lecture to the Sydney Mechanics Institute of 1851 where he asserted that it is in his home that '*a man shows himself as he is*'. The essentials of Stanley's ideal home included a couple of engravings or pictures, a few busts of famous men and a small but respectable collection of cheap editions of classic literature.[18]

There is an explicit link between domestic practices such as decorating and the emergence of new consumer markets and technological advances that made cultural products such as books and engravings available on a mass scale. Increasing suburbanisation was closely connected with the growth of consumerism - not only was there a massive increase in the number of houses and households in urban Australia but these households were becoming more affluent. Between 1911 and 1921, the number of houses being purchased by their occupants had trebled and at

the beginning of the 1920s, home ownership in metropolitan Australia had reached 30%.[19] The detached suburban house was fast becoming the prevalent model for an increasing number of working and middle class households. At the turn of the century, terrace and row houses and small urban cottages were built in declining numbers as more and more Australian houses took on the form and style of the bungalow.

The embracing of the bungalow represents a significant transition in aesthetic sensibilities as people turned away from the fussy, crowded and detailed trappings of high Victorian taste and embraced simpler design approaches. An important source of this transition was the British Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century. Derived from William Morris' rejection of industrialisation and promotion of handwork and craftsmanship, together with John Ruskin's 'truth to materials', arts and crafts became a style that encompassed the architecture of bungalows, mission-style furniture and Morris-style fabrics, wallpapers and carpets. *Arts and Crafts - An Illustrated Magazine of Arts, Handicrafts and Sanitation* was first published in Melbourne in 1895, its title reflecting the movement's combined emphasis on both the aesthetics and moral tone of the household.

The arts and crafts movement promoted the worthiness of making things with your own hands, of regaining a connection to age-old traditions and skills. There also emerged the first arguments for craft and building as a form of work at home that was a relief and creative compensation from the demands of the industrialised workplace and indeed from the more drudge aspects of regular housework. Thus, a whole set of psychotherapeutic arguments emerged to augment both practical and moral ones that had previously promoted the benefits of men and women's domestic efforts. It is argued by a number of historians that industrialisation and the increase of white-collar employment had made the job a '*more ambiguous source of masculine identity*'.[20] In contrast, work around the house had clear economic value and benefited from the legitimacy of skilled labour. By doing work on the house, men were improving the household's standard of living, whilst the use of tools and exercising of manual competence 'retained the aura of pre-industrial vocational masculinity'[21] with clear appeals to men's sense of pride in providing for their family.

The sentiments of the arts and crafts movement had been readily communicated to Australia from both British and American sources. Prominent amongst these was *The Craftsman,* which began publication in New York in 1901 and circulated an Australasian edition by the 1920s. *The Craftsman* was more than just a magazine. Its publisher Gustav Stickley, also founded a firm which operated workshops, showrooms, a library and a lecture room. With evangelist zeal, Stickley worked to convince the public of arts and crafts ideals by providing them with the information and skills they needed to discover the value of making things by hand. The Mission style of furniture he promoted and produced for sale, was certainly easier for people to make themselves and fitted with the incipient modernist dictum that form should follow function. At the same time, new building materials such as plywood and fibreboards that simplified methods of construction were becoming available. Add to this the ever-increasing range of hardware, furnishings, domestic equipment and products that were flooding the emerging domestic markets, especially as Australian production stepped up as a result of the decreasing quantities and increasing prices of exports in the face of World War One. Householders were faced with ever-widening choices in terms of the appearance, style and comfort of their homes.

Experts and taste-makers were on hand to guide suburban consumers in their choices. The development of one of Australia's most prominent home journals is revealing of the changing perceptions of the audience for such publications. *The Australian Home Beautiful* began life in 1912 as *The Real Property Annual*. In August 1922, it was issued as a quarterly and changed its name to *The Australian Home Builder*. An editorial in its first number asserts the reasons for change thus:

The change meets a recognised need for more frequent and more varied information on all matters of practical interest to those who are thinking of buying and building homes and to the many others who possess homes they wish to improve. In town planning, house designing and decorating, the use of building materials, artistic furnishing and aids to domestic economy, Australia has adopted many ideas from Europe and the United States; but on all these and similar matters, there is constantly more to be learned, and it will be one of the aims of *The Australian Home Builder* to keep such subjects in view and its readers usefully informed concerning them.[22]

The general nature of the new title and its varied content meant that the journal captured the interest of consumers as well as of builders, architects, realtors, manufacturers and suppliers. It quickly became a monthly in early 1924 and in October 1925 the title was changed once again to *The Australian Home Beautiful,* a publication which exerted considerable influence in Australia over many decades. Upon this second name change, the editorial was explicit in stating that the magazine's broader focus was for the benefit of the do-it-yourself homemaker:

Australians have a genius for comfortable and hospitable homes equalled in few countries in the world, and all the arts which go to make them - the art of the potter, pictures, furniture, curtains, covers, the garden, cookery, flowers, etc., will find a prominent place. *The Australian Home Beautiful* will be a magazine not merely for those who contemplate building a house - though these will be catered for as hitherto - but for all those who have a home of their

own in which they take a proper pride.[23] By the 1950s, this focus was entrenched and *Home Beautiful* was subtitled 'Australia's How-To-Do-It Magazine'.

Home magazines also had an important role in promulgating ideas about how the modern family should live in the new style homes the magazines were promoting - modernisation was increasingly the logic for all forms of household improvements. Housewives were instructed how to run their homes scientifically and efficiently and kitchens were now described as mini-laboratories or factories. It was claimed that electrical and other domestic appliances would save women time and effort, allowing themselves more time to groom themselves for their husbands or take a greater part in guiding the psychological development of their children. Nicholas Brown describes how the home was emerging as '*the modern domain in which to achieve psychological adjustment between self and society'.[24]* Concepts about the development of the self and psychological needs were expressed in the prevalence of theories about efficient parenting, stages of development such as childhood and adolescence and marriage as a partnership between two individuals. The home was expected to facilitate these new concepts. For example, an article in *Australian Home* in 1925 about the decoration of children's bedrooms made substantial claims linking interior states and the domestic interior:

> *Children are always anxious to copy grown-ups and like to be treated as little men and women with their own special rooms in which they can be taught to take a pride….. As the child advances artistic panels will take the place of the nursery rhyme wallpaper, brilliant prints will be replaced by softer and less meaningless pictures, and maturer judgement will banish the joyful primary colours and contrasts so pleasing to the eyes of youth.*[25]

Writers in the magazines applied the same tone of instruction to adults in matters of taste. Consumers, it was assumed, needed to be educated in how to make their homes modern and contemporary, efficient, wholesome and respectable. A major impact of homemaker magazines and other media was to introduce a visual culture that captured people's imaginations and stimulated the desire to remodel and modernise their homes. Developments in printing techniques meant that readers now encountered sumptuous colour representations of what their homes could be like. Early twentieth century publications introduced the favourite techniques of the 'before and after' story and semi-satirical 'good taste, bad taste' vignettes. Architects of the period were also extremely active in their attempts to bring to the public the 'ideal home' for the twentieth century. Many architects wrote about housing for newspapers and magazines, participated in design competitions and strived to develop modern homes for working families through Government schemes such as the Queensland *Workers' Dwellings Act of 1909* and the *Workers' Homes Act of 1919*.

Increasingly, manufacturers sought to establish direct contact with consumers through the print media. Initially anxious about alienating their traditional professional customers, manufacturers had promoted their products somewhat ambiguously, not really directing them to any particular group. In the interwar period, however, advertising increasingly targets the suburban consumer. Another new phenomenon was the emergence of the slightly wacky craze for labour-savers and homemade versions of store-bought products. Steven Gelber gives the example of devices such as '*bicycle-driven lawn mowers, battery-run hedge trimmers and chicken-operated hen house doors*' to demonstrate how '*the house itself was becoming a hobby, both the location and the object of leisure time activity*'.[26]

However, greater poignancy underlay the promotion of do-it-yourself in the 1930s as Depression conditions made economic incentives for home repair pre-eminent. Manuals of this era stressed maintenance and fixing household items rather than buying new ones when they wore out. Self-reliance was urged in the face of a world where jobs were not assured and the future was uncertain. Gelber also argues that engagement in leisure activities that 'replicated work activity and reinforced work values' was important during the Depression as it enabled people to '*confirm the importance of productive labour as the core activity in modern society*'. They may have been unemployed, but do-it-yourself saved people from being alienated from fundamental and accepted values.[27]

Similar arguments of thrift and frugality applied during the Second World War and do-it-yourself was a necessity due to the shortage of qualified professional workers. Wartime conditions meant that scarce resources needed to be conserved and households were encouraged to maintain their properties and wait for peacetime when the opportunity would come to achieve their ideal home. Women became more directly involved in home maintenance tasks, indeed they were encouraged to learn basic home maintenance as part of their national duty. They had also actively participated in and even controlled many other traditionally male arenas in the workplace and public life, giving them greater confidence in practical matters. By the end of the war, as Carolyn Goldstein writes, '*conditions were ripe for do-it-yourself home improvement to come of age and become integrated into daily domestic life across a wide social spectrum*'.[28]

The immediate postwar period in Australia has become emblematic as the period when Australians embraced suburban domesticity on a mass scale and when a certain vision of home - the owner-occupied, detached house in a garden - became entrenched and normalised in the popular imagination. During this period Australia experienced its

most severe housing shortage along with serious shortages in labour and building materials. At the same time, new households were forming at a high rate and a mass immigration program was underway. Competition for housing was intense - Australia was experiencing both 'house famine' and 'house hunger'.[29] Housing was clearly an issue of extreme salience, not just because of the number of houses that were so urgently required but because house and home were metonymically associated. The concept of 'home' works to circumscribe and define boundaries for the fundamental entities of the self, the family and the nation. During the war, the ideal of 'home' loomed large - Australia, as 'home', was what people were fighting for and 'home' as family and self was the promise of peace. Imagining and designing one's peacetime home was promoted as a constructive distraction from the deprivations of war. Women undertook courses such as 'Marriage and the Home' which involved drawing plans of their future home. As Donna Winchester recalled in 1949,

> '*All this seems ages ago; actually it was 1945. All at once Tom came home from the Navy, and two days later we were married. We went to live with his family. Then his father gave us a piece of land to build on and it was at this point that I fished out my old plan.*'[30]

In the postwar period the public and private meanings of home/house/self/family/nation coalesced and were consciously blurred in the political rhetoric of the time. To own your home was to align personal desires and aspirations with national goals and objectives. The house, as the particular spatialisation of the concept of 'home', became 'the home', a concept which R.G Menzies elaborated as a specific set of political values. In his famous speech of 1942 'The Forgotten People', Menzies spoke about '*homes material, homes human, homes spiritual*'.[31] Judith Brett describes how Menzies uses the home as the

> '*key image of individuality…as a symbol of a full and rich experience of individuality, the home stands in opposition not just to the depersonalised world of work but to all aspects of modern life which seem to diminish the individual's sense of agency*.'[32]

In this, Menzies is appealing to a nostalgic, pre-modern image of stability and connection and offers Australians a sense of security in the face of anxieties brought about by modernisation and war.

A powerful expression of these values and practical response to the specific social and material conditions of the time was the overwhelming number of Australians who built their own homes in the postwar period. Owner-building peaked in 1954 when more than 40 per cent of all houses in Australia were built by their owners. Throughout the 1950s, owner-building accounted for around one-third of new house building.[33] Many people also substantially modified their houses to accommodate the diverse household arrangements that evolved in the face of the housing shortage. It is also at this time that do-it-yourself acquires an actual space for itself in the home. Increasingly, house-plans incorporate a workshop space, or an enlarged garage with purpose-built tool storage areas and benches. In the 1951 *McCall's Book of Modern Houses*, 14 out of the 29 featured houses have some sort of workshop space.[34]

War had brought the development of new building products, tools and materials such as hardboard, well suited to people doing it themselves. After the war, the hardware industry redirected its efforts towards the growing numbers of suburban homeowners. Black and Decker company lore has it that the discovery of the home-based market for power tools came when managers noticed the numbers of employees taking industrial-purpose drills home with them.[35] A consumer market was stimulated with the repackaging and advertising of 'home tools' that were distributed through new channels such as department stores. This recognition by industry of a new mass market is congruent with Fordist interpretations of the 1950s that identify the interrelationship of production and consumption across public and private realms. Manufacturers also repackaged and marketed industrial building products, often in the form of kits, to the amateur builder. Using the example of louvred windows, J M Freeland captures the era thus:

Self help was aided by the introduction of a number of factory-made items which could be installed by any handyman. Glazed louvred widows, for instance, required no more than a drill and a screwdriver to fix their pressed metal frames into position. The frames came in four separate pieces and with the pre-cut glass blades they could be bought from practically any suburban hardware store. They were cheap and so easily fitted that they spread like a rash over the suburbs as verandahs were enclosed to make additional living space in houses where newly-married couples moved in to live with their in-laws, where young families grew in size or owners on fixed incomes divided their houses into flats to make additional money to cope with the rising cost of living.[36]

Furniture was also sold in kit or plan form and magazines provided instructions and plans. Judith O'Callaghan notes that do-it-yourself furniture-making was actually more successful that the attempts to establish mass production of modern furniture in Australia.[37]

Magazines and newspapers were full of advice for owner-builders and do-it-yourselfers. In 1946 the *Sun-News Pictorial* in Melbourne ran a design competition for architects to design small houses suitable for immediate

postwar building conditions. Accompanying the competition, the newspaper undertook a survey to find out what the general public wanted in their homes and 400 women from a variety of suburbs were interviewed. The survey and competition provide a fascinating snapshot about the reception of contemporary professional ideas about what housing should be like. Virtually without exception, the architects' submissions are Modernist in their orientation - flat roofs abound and many designs have an open-plan configuration of the living areas. Yet the survey highlights the conservative preferences of most housing consumers. The majority of respondents objected to the front door opening directly into the sitting room and casement windows were rejected in favour of traditional sash windows.[38]

The competition requirements were explicit in stating that the designs must make provision for future extensions and modifications. This was not an uncommon approach to the postwar housing crisis and it is here that we find home improvement as a strategy for upward mobility as well as recognition that houses were now commonly being perceived as works-in-progress for their owners. A striking example of this process is the massive postwar housing estate, Levittown in New Jersey, USA.

Levittown is often described as the quintessential postwar suburb and was notorious at the time it was built for the extraordinary homogeneity of its physical appearance, provoking portrayals of the houses as 'cookie cutter houses'. William Levitt, the developer of Levittown, pioneered the use of production-line techniques in the building of the houses, which together with government financial sponsorship allowed for a massive number of houses to be built in a rapid period of time. When newly constructed, the first model of Levittown Cape Cod-style houses consisted of four rooms with stairs up to an empty, unfinished attic. The implicit assumption, and indeed sales pitch, being that owners would eventually line the space in order to create extra rooms. Subsequent models incorporated a large window at the back of the living room which had been designed to be removed to become an opening into a future extension. Levittown residents remodelled their houses with gusto and a local industry evolved to meet the need for services, information and materials for remodelling the houses. A local magazine, *Thousand Lanes*, featured three to four major renovations in each issue, advertisements for contractors who specialised in adapting Levittown houses and many examples of homeowners' own projects. In her excellent study of Levittown, Barbara Kelly describes how the remodelling of the houses began a dialectical process of class transition. As the residents transformed what had been a monotonous landscape into '*the combination of picturesque variety and community harmony that is the hallmark of the nineteenth century model suburb*', they raised Levittown to a new socio-economic level that they in turn could derive increased status from.[39]

In this context, home improvement is the key to understanding a whole range of meanings associated with housing, as well as broader cultural concerns about social class in the suburbs. There is much to be learned from examining the things that people do to their houses and untangling the dense mesh of factors that are brought to bear upon their motivations and intentions. Like other everyday activities, do-it-yourself home improvement may appear habitual, mundane and insignificant. I hope I have been able to convince you otherwise. To me, men's and women's involvement in the making and re-making of their homes suggest an active process of negotiating roles, re-defining domesticity and balancing private and public, individual and community. It is in these aspects of suburban lives that we find a surprisingly rich and instructive realm to explore.

References

1 Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960, p 141.

2 Boyd, ibid., p 12.

3 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 2000.

4 Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development, *Study to Investigate the Alterations and Additions Sector of the Housing Industry*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994; BIS Shrapnel, *The Home Improvements Market in Australia - 1997*, BIS Shrapnel, Sydney, 1997; Housing Industry Association, *Building News*, May/June, 2001.

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *How Australians Use their Time*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1997.

6 BIS Shrapnel, ibid., p 2.

7 Miles Lewis, 'Making Do', in Patrick Troy (ed.), *A History of European Housing in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp 41-56.

8 Dingle, 'Necessity the Mother of Invention or Do-it-Yourself', in Patrick Troy (ed.), *A History of European Housing in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 61.

9 quoted in John Archer, *The Great Australian Dream. The History of the Australian House*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1996, p 152.

10 Kerreen M. Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home. Modernizing the Australian family 1880-1940*, Oxford University Press, 1985, p 35.

11 Steven Gelber, 'Do It Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity', *American Quarterly* vol 49, no 1, 1997, p 101.

12 Quoted in Gelber, ibid., p 69.

13 Helen Gregory, 'Lifestyle' in Fisher and Crozier (eds.), *The Queensland House. A roof over our heads*, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1994, p 9.

14 Faye Schutt, 'Management', in Fisher and Crozier (eds.), *The Queensland House. A roof over our heads*, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1994, p 17.
15 Schutt, ibid., p 16.
16 Quoted in Nicholas Brown, 'Making Oneself Comfortable, or More Rooms than Persons' in Patrick Troy (ed.), *A History of European Housing in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 113.
17 quoted in Brown, ibid., p 113.
18 quoted in Brown, ibid., p 110.
19 Peter Cuffley, *Australian Houses of the Twenties and Thirties*, The Five Mile Press, Knoxfield, 1989.
20 Gelber, op.cit., p 68.
21 Gelber, ibid., p 73.
22 Cuffley, ibid., p 38.
23 Zeny Edwards, *The Australian Home Beautiful in New South Wales 1925-1950. An Index*, Sydney, 1995, p 6.
24 Brown, op.cit., p 116.
25 Brown, ibid., p 116.
26 Gelber, op.cit., p 83.
27 Gelber, ibid., pp 85-86.
28 Carolyn Goldstein, *Do-It -Yourself. Home Improvement in Twentieth Century America*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1998, p 31.
29 Helen Grace, 'icon house': towards a suburban topophilia', in Grace, Hage, Johnson, Langsworth and Symonds*, Home/World: Space, community and marginality in Sydney's west*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1997, pp 163-164.
30 quoted in John Archer, *The Great Australian Dream. The History of the Australian House*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1996, pp 187-189.
31 Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1992, pp 7-9.
32 ibid., pp 44-47.
33 Tony Dingle, 'Necessity the Mother of Invention, or Do-It-Yourself', in Patrick Troy (ed.), *A History of European Housing in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 68.
34 Mary Davis Gillies, *McCall's Book of Modern Houses*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1951.
35 Goldstein, op.cit., p 49.
36 J.M Freeland, *Architecture in Australia. A History*, F W Cheshire, Melbourne, 1968, p 267.
37 Judith O'Callaghan, 'The Australian Interior: The Importance of Being Contemporary', in Judith O'Callaghan (ed.), *The Australian Dream. Design of the Fifties*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1993, pp 173-174.
38 *The Sun Post-war Homes*, The Sun-News Pictorial, Melbourne, 1946, pp 2-3.
39 Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream. Building and Rebuilding Levittown*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993, p 12.

Jo Besley is a post graduate student in the Department of Architecture, University of Queensland studying home improvement and home renovation in Brisbane suburbs. She has worked as a researcher in the fields of housing, cultural heritage, public art and community consultation.

Builders and Barbecues

Meredith Walker

Abstract

In identifying buildings of significance, considerable attention has been given to the works of individual architects; but much of the character of the suburbs has always been the work of builders constructing houses on spec or to order. In Annandale, a later 19th Century inner-west suburb of Sydney, there is a variety of dwelling types and facades 'scattered' throughout the suburb, and clearly the work of individual builders. The Newcastle suburb of Hamilton South-East, is similar. Techniques for investigating the work of builders and their contribution to suburban character is discussed, using detail plans and other sewerage records. Suggestions about analysis, conservation and promotion are made, including reference to the contribution of owners, through barbecues and other works.

One of the wonderful things about this conference is that we are all familiar with the subject, through firsthand experience. Through living in (or near) suburbs, each of us knows the rewards of getting to know a suburb really well. But we have also come here to learn more. Here's a little of my experience. I am a child of suburbia. I have lived most of my life in three capital cities, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, within twenty minutes of each city centre. I know and love their suburban characters, and relish the differences between suburbs within each city.

Architect-designed houses are uncommon in suburbia

In 1936 my father, then in his 20s, engaged one of Melbourne's smart young architects, Race Godfrey, to design a house for himself and my mother. Their block was one of thirty lots, part of a re-subdivision of the Mount Ida hospital, which before then had been a villa with an orchard.

When the house was under construction, two other young couples liked the look of it and engaged the same architect. Apart from these three houses, all recognisably similar, Mount Ida Avenue had several other architect-designed houses, and the street was quite distinctive. At least to the eyes of the inhabitants.[1]

Architect-designed houses, like my family's house, are part of suburbia, but houses designed and built by builders are far and away more common. Since I left the family home I have lived in flats and houses all designed and

Figure 1: 'The Walker House' one of 3 houses in Mt Ida Ave Hawthorn, Melbourne, designed by Race Godfrey, constructed in 1937

Layers of history in suburbia

Most suburban areas are the subdivision of previous uses, such as the grounds of a villa – like Lyndhurst, Glebe – or a rural use.[2] But also among the suburbs are older villages and towns, joined together by later re-subdivisions of villa estates and rural or urban-fringe uses. This stone sugar mill at Canterbury, and the village for its workers, is an early settlement near Sydney, surrounded and almost obscured by later suburban development.[3]

Figure 2: Canterbury Sugar Mill, Sydney, constructed 1940-42 with a village for workers alongside

In suburbia, the layers or periods of development can be readily recognised once you understand the processes. The lines of land grants, the boundaries of early uses and buildings constructed prior to the small lot suburban development are all recognisable. (Indeed the process of suburbanisation around the centre of Sydney as left more physical evidence of history than the process of comprehensive redesign that occurs in Canberra and in the fringe areas of Sydney). It is common for houses to be remodelled for convenience, comfort or fashion, adding another layer to the story of suburbia. White painted concrete balusters are common in house remodelling in Lilyfield and Leichhardt.

Figure 3: Houses, Emmerick St Lilyfield, Sydney. These early 20th century houses were renovated by local builders in the 1970s, adding another layer to suburbia

The work of builders and the use of ready-made components

The inner Sydney suburb of Annandale is made up of several different, commonly occurring dwelling types, designed and constructed by builders. This late Victorian house (brick with rendered façade) is one of them. It is probably recognisable to anyone familiar with Annandale, where more than 20 houses like it were built, in groups of two or three, some of which have been substantially altered.

Figure 4: One of 20+ houses with the same or very similar façades in Annandale, Sydney

Nearby in the suburbs of Lilyfield and Leichhardt, are common house types (similar but different) by other builders. Some builders developed almost the whole of the estate, using a palette of designs, with components from building suppliers, such as George Hudson, timber merchant. An examination of my house in Lilyfield (built 1905) shows that the majority of its joinery (including the front fence and gate) can be seen in the catalogue of Goodlet and Smith. I can't be sure that the joinery came from Goodlet and Smith as it might have been supplied by other timber merchants producing the same profiles and using the same templates or woodworking tools, imported from England. Some of the fancy details of houses, such as decorative bargeboards, can be seen in the catalogues of timber merchants, made to order from already existing templates.

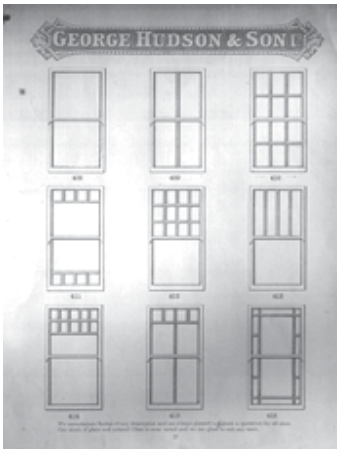


Figure 5: A page from the George Hudson catalogue, 1905

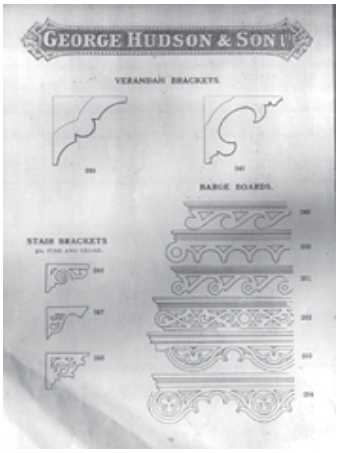


Figure 6: Brackets and bargeboards, George Hudson catalogue, 1905

In heritage practice, the design of buildings has always focused on architects. Designs have always been described primarily in terms of architecture and architectural styles, rather than as designs by builders made using readily available components, and working with other trades.

In relation to Queensland, I have noted (as have others, particularly Don Watson[4]), that in any specific locality, the commonly occurring features in house design are not a local vernacular style, but more likely to indicate the work of individual architects or builders. However, in the state as a whole, some details invented by architects or builders are copied by others and become common practice, for example, the use of diagonal external framing in timber buildings in Queensland.

Garden Suburb Hamilton and the contribution of builders to its character

In 1987 & 1997 I undertook two small studies of the Garden Suburb, Hamilton, Newcastle.[5] This estate was developed on land used primarily for mining by the Australian Agricultural Company. The suburbs of Newcastle comprise a series of mining towns joined together by later development. The studies of Hamilton South-East provided an opportunity to investigate the work of builders through a combination of records.

In 1913 the A. A. Company engaged two well-known town planners, John Sulman and John Hennesey, to design the Garden Suburb. It was the last large area of undeveloped land near the centre of Newcastle. The plan continued the rectangular grids already established around it, and included some new wide main roads including a parkway, with a wide median leading to the fashionable beachside suburb of Merewether.

The marketing as a 'Garden Suburb' appears to have been more a selling point, than a desire for a better standard of development. In a letter acknowledging the receipt of the initial plans, Colonel Ranclaud, the chief clerk of the A. A. C. wrote:

> *'we note the proposals as to the 100 ft avenues, but also that you show a 16 ft footpath in a 66 ft street. We trust this is not a material point to the new design as the local custom is 12 ft footpaths, and local councils might demur at an alteration.'*

John Sulman replied

> *'As regards the 16 ft footpath in a 66 ft street, I am quite aware that it is not the usual custom, which is 12 ft, but the sooner it is abandoned, the better it would be for both the Councils and the public; for the Councils because it would save in metalling if the street is to be metalled all over, and for the public because it reduces dust, and for both because it permits the planting of trees at any time in a suitable position, whereas 12 ft does not.'*

Over the years, the AA Company removed, or didn't implement, the majority of the features of the initial design that might have marked it as a garden suburb. The company, its engineers and surveyors, opted instead to follow its past or local practice.

The first auction of land was in May 1914. In the centre of Gordon Avenue, at the northern entrance to the estate, were stone pillars, and nearby were two architect designed brick houses, identical except mirror reversed. At the southern end were two more architect designed houses, again identical and mirror reversed, opposite each other. These houses were built to demonstrate the standard of development that was expected and to encourage building. The northern area was brick, protected by covenants, and parts of the southern areas, developed in the mid 1920s were predominantly timber, probably because the continued application or adherence to the covenants was regarded as unreasonable. The timber houses feature gables with small half width porches. The predominance of timber, single storey houses, with gabled façades gives the area considerable homogeneity. See Figure 7.

Figure 7: Garden suburb, Hamilton, Newcastle

Garden Suburb Hamilton was popular. In part this was due to the regular release of land through auction. This practice allowed the land to be progressively made ready for building, it provided a regular supply for local builders, and it encouraged owners to build, rather than speculate. It kept lots in demand and the price stable.

All the land was sewered at the time of sale. When applying to connect to the sewer the Hunter Water Board allocated a number to each allotment – the connection number. Large registers record the date of application, the names of the applicant and the owner, the material of the building, and the date of connection to the sewer – usually within six months of application.

Figure 8: Detail plan. The connection numbers to the sewer are shown on each allotment and details of owner and sometimes the builder are in registers

The brick area of Garden Suburb Hamilton was the first to be recognised as significant (and worthy of conservation), but when one of the timber houses nearby was unexpectedly demolished, pressure from nearby owners led to a further study of the adjoining predominantly timber areas. Whilst the funds were limited, I arranged for information from registers to be entered in a database and sorted. Post Office directories and electoral rolls were then used to discover the occupation and address of those involved.

As I suspected, many of the people who applied to connect properties to the sewer were builders, carpenters or plumbers. Inspection of the houses reveals that each builder had his own house types, with a similar look but different details, from other builders.

Unfortunately the area was small, and research only covered the period from 1923 to 1927 (as the large registers were still in use and not readily available). Information was found for over 200 houses – 49 brick, 151 timber. The most commonly occurring builder was R. F. Lee who built at least 24 houses, including one for his family, and the

others for owners known at the time of application. Other builders were the Anderson family (12 houses), and Peterson Bros 12 houses, including two for rental. Some of the houses were built 'on spec', i.e., for sale after or during construction.

The area was popular with builders themselves with 14 builders or their families choosing to live there. The owners were a wide variety, and contrary to common belief, many of the houses were built for rental, with owners living nearby, e.g., at Newcastle East. Inspection of other Newcastle suburbs revealed some of the same house types, presumably by the same builders.

Nowadays, the details are being removed and replaced by more up market features. The character of the work of the Newcastle builders is being altered by modern fashion for embellishment. From conversations with owners, I suspect that many people are not recognising original features as original, and believe that they are following the intent of the zoning, as promoted in heritage guidelines, with their emphasis on architectural style.

Figure 9: Houses constructed by R.F. Lee, builder 1925, photo 1997 page 29 Garden Study Hamilton study of southern area

Figure 10: House built by Mr Lee. An example of embellishment: some details have been removed and different new reproduction details added

Local builders + local suppliers + local fashion + local look and character

The look of Newcastle's suburbs derives largely from the house design of its builders and their interaction with suppliers. The Hunter Water Board records, combined with other sources, provide a wonderful opportunity to understand the process of development and the character of its houses. At present our understandings of suburbia are largely based on architectural and planning concepts. There is little understanding of the phenomena of its development and the influence of the people involved. More study is needed so that we understand suburbia as social history and appreciate its meanings to the inhabitants.

Now to the rotary clothes hoist and the barbecue

Rotary clothes hoist and the Barbecues[6]

The rotary clothes hoist and the barbecue have long been recognised as suburban icons; for example on the cover of *Australian Popular Culture*, in 1979 and in *Suburban Icons – a celebration of the everyday*, by Steve Bedwell, in 1991. Both the standard clothes hoist and the barbecue came to prominence in the 1950s; but both had existed before then.

Rotary clothes hoists

The clothes line or drying lawn has always been a fundamental part of the back yard. All other uses – growing vegetables and flowers were optional. In published designs for suburban allotments (at least from 1920s onwards) a wide range of features were accommodated. In addition to the clothes drying area there is:

- decorative or pleasure garden with features such as pond or a bird bath
- garage and shed
- fuel store
- vegetable garden
- play area for children – cubby house
- utility area – compost and incinerator; and
- outdoor living area (a porch or patio adjoining the house, or bush house at the rear)

Figure 11: This ad for Toyne's appeared regularly in *Australian Home Beautiful* in the 1950s

The standard clothes hoist, as Peter Cuffley relates in *Australian Houses of the Forties and Fifties*, was gaining popularity in Australia in the 1920s. Both the long lines with props and rotary clothes hoist were in use from 1920s to 1960s, when the clothes hoist was used almost exclusively in new suburban development.

Toyne's in the Melbourne suburb of East Malvern, manufactured patented designs from 1924. In the 1930s they included an hydraulic hoist. Production halted during the second world war, restarting in 1946.

1946 was also the year that Lance Hill developed the Hills Hoist, initially to solve the conflict of a lemon tree overtaking the old line in his own backyard. Other manufacturers of clothes hoists included *Arnolds* and *Windmill*. The *Windmill* had a pipe edge with lines running at an angle, instead of parallel to the edge. This arrangement worked with the wind; the clothes to be hung out more readily from one position, and the design limited the extent to which garments could blow outwards, and thereby needed less space than other models.

Whilst the rotary clothes hoist became readily available and fashionable in the mid twentieth century, it appears to have existed in the nineteenth century. Several years ago my colleague, James Broadbent, faxed me an extract from a nineteenth century DIY book, it was a sketch of a rotary clothes hoist – to which he added a suitably humorous notation. Unfortunately our attempts to find it again have been unsuccessful!

The rotary clothes hoist, was almost universally accepted within the community. However, in gardening and landscape design books, designs for backyards continued to favour long parallel lines; when rotary clothes hoists were shown they were always sited away from recreational areas, often screened from view, whereas drying lawns were out in the open, often continuous with vegetable gardens.

I suspect that gardeners and landscape architects thought the rotary clothes hoist was ugly. In Brunnings' *Australian Gardener* 1957 edition, readers were advised that

> *'rotary hoists are popular at present, but sometimes a narrow strip with suitable raising gear for a line is better. This is particularly so if the main house window overlooking the back garden is centrally placed and space is short on both sides . . . Generally, the clothes hoist is best placed as close to the boundary as possible, on the laundry side leaving a clear stretch of garden . . .'*

In the 1960s, architects, such as the critic Robin Boyd, certainly thought clothes hoists ugly. Like many other products that were ubiquitous – such as linoleum and *Feltex*, clothes hoists (and other aspects of suburbia) were scorned and derided: they were ugly, occupied too much space, etc, etc. Fortunately the tide has turned on rotary clothes hoists. Several house museums have clothes hoists I understand that some people now use rotary clothes hoists for the display of objects, such as tea towels, aprons and tablecloths and bedspreads.

Barbecues or Bar-b-q

In mid twentieth century *Barbecue* referred to an outdoor fireplace for cooking, and later became a noun and a verb, a piece of equipment and an activity. The barbecue was actively promoted in the popular press: in newspapers, magazines and in books compiled from them.

The barbecue was promoted as 'a labour saver for the housewife', 'an activity for the man of the house' and an activity 'where guests may cook and enjoy an informal meal.' A barbecue was (and is) whatever you want – as simple and informal as you want it to be.

In *Australian Home Carpentry* (a collection of newspaper articles published by the *Herald and Weekly Times* in Melbourne and Sydney) the barbecue is described as 'an American activity derived from the campfire and outdoor cooking.'

In some ways, the barbecue, as an essentially informal activity, was a counter to the dinner party, promoted at the same time, in the same publications, and with similar journalistic enthusiasm. In 1950s and 60s building a barbecue was an exercise or lesson for the home handyman – a lesson for amateurs in bricklaying in the 1950s. The promotion of concrete blocks in the 1960s made constructing the barbecue even easier.

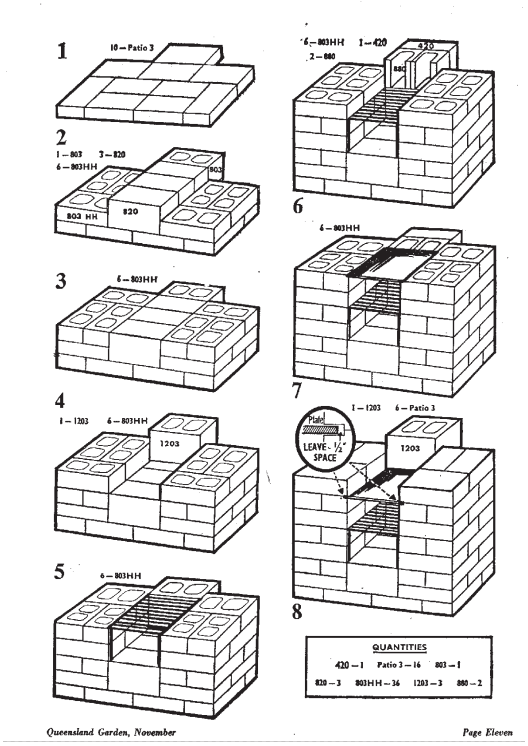


Figure 12: article from *Queensland Gardener* in 1964 was one in a series of *do it yourself designs* for barbecues

'With the aid of the step-by-step chart . . . the home handyman can build a professional looking barbecue easily and quickly, and at a total cost of just over 8 pounds.
Why not get busy right away, and make the most of summer. Dad will enjoy being the chef and producing juicy, mouth watering steaks for the whole family, while mother will enjoy the freedom and ease of meals outdoors.'

Designs for barbecues varied considerably. In designs by architects the barbecue is often part of a wall that extends from the house, or a wall that defines the edge of the outdoor living area adjoining the house.

Paved outdoor living areas had become a common feature of architects' designs in the 1920s and 1930s onwards, and it was not surprising that barbecues made their appearance in walls near the house in the 1940s. More research might find earlier examples.

In the 1950s and 60s designs by landscape architects and gardeners, the barbecue appears as a feature at the end of the garden, in its own setting, usually a paved area with built-in seating. This garden setting may have been intended to simulate a picnic area.

'From the women's point of view, the necessities (for a barbecue) are plenty of working surface. Plenty of wood, a fire at a comfortable height, a knowledge of timing, a manageable grill, and a comfortable table and seats. And when she has all these, its ten to one the men will take over the whole thing out of her hands and show her how it should be done.'

Experience with barbecues led to changes, particularly in the height and material of the cooking surfaces, and in the fuel used. In the 1950s the barbecue is an open wire grill in a few courses of brickwork above the ground. By the 1960s, in the designs using concrete blocks, the cooking surface has got higher and is sometimes a flat steel plate. In the 1970s, portable barbecues (such as the Hibatchi and the Webber) became common and there is a range of fuel sources, coal, gas and electricity.

Accessories for clothes hoists and barbecues

Both the clothes hoist and the barbecue came with accessories. The rotary clothes hoist had pegs and a peg bag. These Dura plastic pegs (designed to suit the narrower gauge of wire of the hoist to the long line) were first manufactured in 1950 and became instantly popular. In the 1960s, canvas covers (usually in two colours) were made for hoists so that they could function like an umbrella.

People found their own uses for the clothes hoist. In the 1960s and 70s the hoist above the rear of the fish shop in Oxford Street Paddington, was used regularly for drying octopus. Children used clothes hoists as a jungle jim.

The barbecue prompted a whole suit of accessories: long-handled wire forks, a flipper and prongs, oversized peppers and salts; aprons and gloves, furniture and (of course) recipes. *Australian Home Carpentry*, published in the early 1950s describes the trimmings for barbecues, and the necessities for design:

'While cooking goes on, a large apron with enormous pockets is absolutely necessary. One can have pot holders or gloves attached by tapes and rings to this apron if one likes. There are decorative place-mats and special gadgets of all kinds if one wants to beat the next woman, but it's best to keep things simple and concentrate on the food and the fun.'

In the mid 1950s the *Australian Women's Weekly* encouraged children to make barbecue aprons for their dads, from hessian with cloth bindings and appliquéd representations of meat and vegetables. The barbecue apron continues to be a popular gift idea.

Nowadays, the backyard is becoming more of a fashion statement – a place to demonstrate one's good taste and ingenuity. Clothes hoists usually removed in favour of lines, and barbecues are a moveable feast, with cooking equipment on wells or a trolley.

Conclusion

So what can we make of this information? At present everyone (owners, heritage practitioners and councils) appear to have difficulty recognising what's important about suburbia, beyond the well-recognised large houses already heritage listed and the pockets (or estates) or suburban development that display consistency in form, materials and design. Rotary clothes hoists and barbecues are only two components of backyards that are worthy of more research, before they become rare. Such research would provide a context in which individual examples could be understood.

More attention should be given to the work of local builders, including oral history. Guideline documents could refer to the work of local builders and their contribution to local character, with less emphasis on architectural style.

Local government heritage studies could be adapted to include examination of the patterns and character of suburbs, rather than focus on the identification of individual heritage places and areas, as they do now. Such an approach may lead to greater awareness of local urban character by residents. Heritage studies could be linked with oral histories to gain an appreciation of community attitudes to suburbia and the use of the yard.

Finally a comment on heritage controls: after more than two decades of development control on heritage places, I suspect that owners (and their advisers) are less inclined to follow the advice from either Councils or state government heritage agencies. I hear reports from my colleagues, that architects and other designers are confident in their approach to heritage places and prepared to argue against the controls – adopted by Council following a legitimate process. Respect for Councils (and their planning controls) appears to be diminishing. From my experience with local government (now more than thirty years) I suspect that some people involved with new developments get more satisfaction from getting around controls than they do from complying! Whatever controls or guidelines are prepared, retaining some of the 20th century features of gardens and yards will rely upon appreciation and interest from owners. We should enjoy suburbia while we can!

References

1 The three houses designed by architect Race Godfrey are numbers 26 (Walkers') 20 (Crofts') 19 (Howards'). Other architect designed houses included 28 (designed by H. M. Rolland, architect for Canberra in 1920s, for his retirement house); No 16 designed by Alan Ralton, partner at Bates Smart & Mccutheon in the 1950s.

2 Lyndhurst was designed by John Verge 1833-37 for the principal Colonial surgeon Dr James Bowman. From 1852 it housed St Mary's College, and by 1878 parts of the house had been demolished and it was converted to three flats. Land around was subdivided and terrace houses constructed. (Lyndhurst Conservation Centre, Appeal brochure, Historic Houses Trust of NSW 1984)

3 Canterbury Sugar Mill was constructed 1840-42 on the banks of the Cooks River for the Australian Sugar Company. A village was developed alongside, between the mill and Canterbury Road. All the original workers cottages and early development nearby was demolished and most of the buildings near the mill date from the late 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century.

4 Watson, Donald, The Queensland House, Report for the National Trust of Queensland, 1980, pp8.3-8.4

5 Walker, M., Hamilton South East Conservation Study, for Newcastle Council 1986, Meredith Walker 'Garden Suburb Hamilton, Newcastle - A Study of the Southern area' Report for Newcastle City Council, 1997

6 This section is based on my own experience and research of contemporary publications, see Bibliography.

Bibliography

Andersons, *Australian Garden Guide*, undated. (1960s)

Australian Gardening Today Illustrated, Sun News Pictorial, Melbourne, undated

Australian Home Beautiful, Jan-Dec 1950

Australian Picture Handyman: A practical guide to home craftsmen, Herald and Weekly Times Ltd, Melbourne, undated. [1950s]

Boyd, Jessie, *The Australian Gardener*, Summit Books, Paul Hamlyn P/L, 1978

Brunning's Australian Gardener, revised by Ernest E. Lord, FRHA, Robertson & Mullens Ltd, Melbourne

Dwight, John, *Gardening Handbook*, South Australian Housing Trust, undated., [post 1950]

Guertner, Beryl, (Comp) Gregory's Guide to Better Gardens, in association with Australian House and Garden, undated [1950s]

Hudson, Nicholas & McEwan, Peter, That's our house: A History of housing in Victoria, The Ministry of Housing, 1986

Mellor, Olive, *Complete Australian Gardener Illustrated*, The Sunday Sun, Sydney, undated [1950s]

Newton, Patricia & Pollard, Edna, *Planning your new garden*, Wilke & Co Ltd., Melbourne, 1968

Smith, Alex, *Australian Home Carpentry Illustrated*, The Sunday Sun Sydney, undated [1950s]

Spearritt, Peter & Walker, David, *Australian Popular Culture*, 1979

Your Garden, March, May and July 1948; Dec 1951; Oct-Dec 1952; Sept 1955.

Meredith Walker is a conservation practitioner, Heritage Futures, with a background in local government planning. She has worked throughout Australia on a wide range of projects, including town studies and conservation plans for individual places. She is a former president of Australia ICOMOS, and a conservation activist. Meredith is actively involved in the review of the *Burra Charter*, the standard for good practice and is co-author of *The Illustrated Burra Charter: Making Good Decisions for the Care of Important Places*. Another important recent publication is *Protecting the Social Value of Public Places*, published by the ACNT. Meredith is a past member of the National Parks and Wildlife Council and various Heritage Council Committees. She is currently a member of the Museums Advisory Committee of the NSW Ministry for the Arts. She has had a long-term involvement in heritage management including community-based identification programmes.

Streetscape in Suburbia: a Case Study in Canterbury

Ian Latham

Abstract

Canterbury is a large inner western council in Sydney stretching from the edge of Botany Bay to Punchbowl. Its demographics are characterised by a higher than percentage of non English speaking background residents with a lower than average level of formal qualification and income. Community participation in council affairs has been low and the Council has traditionally adopted policies supporting development. This has been typified in its single dwelling code that allows the demolition and building of houses with little regard to heritage, bulk or streetscape.

In recent years, the eastern end of Canterbury has begun to deviate from these characteristics. Recent arrivals to the suburb are more affluent, have higher formal qualifications and are keener to involve themselves in council processes. They have also been keener to incorporate streetscape and heritage issues into the planning issues.

These two seemingly contradictory views collided in the context of a demolition and development application in Ashbury; a suburb in the north eastern tip of the council area. The proposal was for a substantial multi storey house in an area characterised by predominantly inter war single story houses. The proposal showed up ambiguities in the planning code relating to restrictions on height and floor space ratios. It also showed a lack of any effective control on architectural style and streetscape impact.

In addition, the proposal showed inadequacies in the decision making process of the council ranging from limited expertise on streetscape and design issues through the limited time and resources for the elected councillors to the importance of political influence in the process. It also brought into stark contrast the imbalance in the appeal process between the rights of developers and objectors.

Option for reform are examined. These include the bolstering of expert advice, the overhaul of planning codes, proposed amendment to the legislative regime and possible avenues for groups of objectors in similar circumstances.

In 2001, Canterbury Council dealt with a development application for a house in Goodlet St Ashbury. The level of public interest in the development was unprecedented and brought under scrutiny the planning regime at Canterbury Council. This paper sets out a summary of those events, some lessons that might be learnt along with the author's recommendations for reform.

Introduction

Canterbury Council, in NSW, stretches from Botany Bay in the east to Punchbowl in the west. The city covers an area of 33.4 sq. km and has 16 suburbs within its boundaries. Its population according to the 1996 census was 132,360 of whom just under half were non English speaking background. Its median weekly household income was $500-699.

Its northern most tip is Ashbury, a small suburb named for its position between Ashfield and Canterbury. It is a suburb of about 2,500. According to the 1996 census it is substantially more white collar than Canterbury as a whole (46.3% as opposed to 32%) and slightly more tertiary educated (15.4% as opposed to 12.7%). It is substantially more affluent with its median weekly household income between $700-999 and it has a substantially higher percentage of home ownership (61% as opposed to 43%). Anecdotally, it would seem that these differences would have increased since 1996.

In 1995, the National Trust of Australia (NSW) described Ashbury as possessing streetscape integrity, an excellent state of preservation of houses and gardens and a uniformity of housing style including colour, form and architectural detail. It described the building style as one of predominantly 1920s Californian Bungalows with some later 1930s houses. Slightly over 100 of the privately owned shops and houses in Canterbury are listed on the Canterbury Council Heritage Register.[1] The area has a local Canterbury and District Historical Society, a body reliant upon the Council for funding. It writes worthy submissions to Council about the demolition of historical buildings. It is generally ignored.

The Planning Regime in Canterbury

The building code that governs houses in Canterbury is memorable for its sparseness. Its objectives are:

> *2.1 To ensure an acceptable standard of dwelling house development and to encourage good design within the City of Canterbury.*

> *2.2 To permit the reasonable enjoyment of land within the Council Area and recognise the desire of individuals to develop the land to suit their particular needs whilst having regard to the existing and future amenity of the neighbourhood.*[2]

Those with a sense of irony might see a conflict between both objectives. The rest of the code is not blessed with the same conceptual difficulties. There are set out a number of numerical equations such as building lines, set backs, height, floor space ratio and car parking. The maximum height of houses (which became a major issue in the assessment of the development) was defined as being 7.2 metres. The definition of height was the vertical distance between natural ground level and any artificially formed ground level whichever is the lower, measured at any point on the perimeter of the building to the underside of the uppermost ceiling.

Design criteria are set out in three paragraphs. They state that:

> *a) Multi-level dwellings shall incorporate one internal stairway.*
>
> *b) Provision of duplicated stairways and kitchen and/or laundry facilities are generally not favoured, and will be considered on their individual merit*
>
> *c) Where any side elevation configuration presents a lengthy unbroken appearance in relation to wall or roof design, Council may require provision of suitable architectural breaks to achieve a satisfactory and acceptable side elevation design.*

To add to the ambiguity, the Council had a practice of delegating to the General Manager all matters other than those that the Council was unable to delegate under the *Local Government Act*. Perhaps unusually there were no criteria set out in the delegations, nor it seems in any council policy, about how these delegations were to be exercised. Traditionally, houses were assessed by the officers without reference to Council.[3]

The development at Goodlet St. exposed many of these contradictions. Unusually, the DA was referred to Council to determine. Unusually, many of the objectors were organised and understood the planning regime that existed. The debate that ensued said much about Canterbury Council and local government in general.

The Planning Process

In February 2001, the DA was reported to Council. Objections had been received from 23 objectors and the Secretary of Ashfield and District Historical Society. These objections stressed the bulk and scale of the building as compared to the rest of the street and the suburb. While the objectors did not claim that Ashbury was in a pristine architectural state, they called on council to make this development a precedent for the future. They also called on Council to assess the development on the proposed new single dwelling code which used design based criteria rather than the numerical criteria of the current code.

The Director in charge of planning wrote in part in his report that:

> *I think that it is generally accepted that Ashbury is an area that has a certain neighbourhood character, brought about by its consistency of streetscape, neighbourhood character of houses in a garden setting. It is important that this neighbourhood character be taken into account when assessing applications. This is not to suggest that people will not be able to extend, improve or change their dwellings, but that any such changes should be compatible and take into consideration the neighbourhood character. It is noted that there are a number of houses in Goodlet Street that have been altered in some way, and there are a number of two storey dwellings. Ashbury is at a point where Council needs to decide how much weight should be given to preservation of the character of the area. This is important in this particular case, because the design of this proposal is not in keeping with the character of the area.*
>
> *While the development complies with numerical requirements of the Code, I doubt that the development could be described as compatible with the streetscape, and this is a factor that we need to take into consideration when dealing with this application and applications in future for this area.*
>
> *I think that the design of the building is sufficiently out of character with the existing streetscape in Goodlet Street to warrant refusal. However given the circumstances this could encourage the applicant to consider his position and submit a proposal which could be acceptable without the need for lodgement of a new development application. It is noted that the applicant already has a right of appeal as the application has not been determined within 40 days. I would suggest that the Committee could defer consideration of the proposal, and indicate to the applicant that we would be prepared to consider an amended proposal which provided for a design which was more compatible with the character of the area.*[4]

The matter was deferred for consideration at the Council meeting to be held on 22 February 2001[5]. At that meeting Council resolved:

> *'THAT the application be deferred to allow the applicant to lodge a revised plan that addresses the following concerns identified in relation to the current application:*

1 Loss of privacy and overshadowing to adjoining properties caused by the excessive bulk and intrusive nature of the proposed dwelling.

2 The detrimental affect on the existing neighbourhood character caused by the excessive height and unsympathetic design of the proposed dwelling.'

3 The applicant and objectors be advised of the date and time of the on-site inspection.'

By this stage the community concern had prompted a major public discussion. An organisation called the Ashbury Association was established in part to deal with development issues in the area. It held large local public meetings. A petition was circulated in favour of the proposal. The Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning wrote to Council expressing his concern as to development in the area saying that he agreed 'with many of the concerns of the Ashbury Association about a number of new detached houses approved by the Council which grossly ignore their context in terms of building height, bulk, design, materials, colours and textures'. Tellingly, the architect spoke to the local newspaper criticising the Ashbury Association. Interestingly, he was quoted as saying that

good buildings are designed by individuals not by governments and not by legislation...[He] said until this experience, working with Canterbury Council had been far freer than some other councils, the consequences being the area has ended up with some bad developments, but on the other hand, some very good ones too. We could expect less exceptional designs under tighter controls. In the controlled areas your [sic] going to end up with the bland, the medium that's considered to be the lowest common denominator.

By August 2001, an amended plan was submitted. According to the officer' report,[6] this plan had the building being reduced in overall height by approximately 800mm due to an increase in the depth of the excavation and the change in the pitch of the roof from 35 to 30 degrees.

Objections were received from residents, the Ashbury Association, the National Trust and the Ashfield and District Historical Society. The report dealt in detail with the height of the proposed building, a point on which the objectors had sought legal advice. The advice stated that the height was over the 7.2 metre requirement in the code. The Director wrote in part that:

'*Under the provisions of our Code the height of the building is measured from the finished design ground level at the perimeter of the building to the upper most ceiling. The maximum height of the building under the Code is 7.2m.*

The site is relatively flat, having minimum cross fall sloping towards the rear with a difference of approximately 1m between the front and rear boundaries. The height of the building ranges between 6.38m to 6.93m above the existing natural ground level, with the exception of the entry point into the basement area. As the floor level of the basement area varies between 1.7m to 2.27m below currently existing ground level the height of the building at this entry point is 8.65m, which includes the 3m wide driveway underneath the building...

The Single Dwelling Code does not have specific objectives that relate to regulation of the height of the building, however it would be reasonable to assume that the maximum height limit was designed to regulate the impact on the street as well as the impact on adjoining dwellings. Taking all factors into consideration, this design, while not strictly complying with the numerical standards at one point, would from a visual appearance point of view, meet the objectives of the maximum height dimension proposed in the Code.

With the change in design and the provision of side entry to the garage area the merits of the particular aspect have been considered, rather than splitting hairs over legal interpretation of this clause which did not anticipate larger type basement areas on relatively flat sites.

Issues of design and streetscape were dealt with reasonably quickly with the Director saying that:

While it has been suggested that the changes made to the elevations facing the street could be seen as cosmetic, I think this is unfair as they are substantial, and will be a visual improvement on the previous design as submitted. The revised design will be more in sympathy with the existing streetscape and neighbourhood character.

The changes include the use of bricks which are more compatible in this area than the proposed rendering as submitted previously thus improving the visual impact. The glass areas and curved surfaces have been replaced by windows with openings that are consistent with prominent pattern in the Ashbury area. Support columns have been replaced to be more compatible with the predominant type within the Ashbury area, and generally the front facade has been overhauled. Retaining walls are to be of a sandstone appearance.'

Section 79C of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* was dealt with in the following terms:

'Section 79C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act specifies matters that we must consider when determining a development application, these include the provisions of any environmental planning instrument, development control plans and any prescribed matters. It covers the impact of development on

the environments, both natural and built, as well as social and economic impacts. The suitability of the site for development is an issue to be examined as are any submissions that are received. A general 'public interest' point is included.

The provisions of Section 79C are quite broad and open for interpretation. The report gives consideration to the points raised under this section of the Act.

The recommendation was for approval subject to conditions. The recommendation was adopted by Council and that was that. The next door neighbour (and one of the major objectors) wrote later that:

Although being employed in the planning profession for nearly 20 years, I was not prepared for the incredible forces in Canterbury Council brought to play to result in the approval of a demonstrably inappropriate 'house' next door to my family's now former home in Goodlet Street. We have subsequently moved due to both the approval of the house and wearing process pursued by the council and the applicant over an 18 month period to impress upon us the futility in expressing our understandable opposition and the inevitably that the house in its essentially original form would be approved.

The complaint was by now truly futile. Somewhat incongruously, objectors have no right of appeal to the Land and Environment Court on merit grounds. This significantly strengthens the hands of developers vis a vis councils given that the worse case for a developer is the position originally adopted by Council. In addition the private certification process (which was not in play here), further strengthens the hands of developers, particularly given the absence of any genuine appeal or disciplinary process against the decisions of arrived certifiers. The Land and Environment Court has itself been subject to much criticism for a pro development bias.[7]

A montage of the existing street and the development prepared by one of the objectors and its dimensions were contested by the developer.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this approval was seen as a precedent by a number of other developers in Ashbury. A number of these were simply approved by the officers under delegation. Another proposal in Goodlet St. itself, by a member of the same family and using the same architect as the first, came to Council in February 2002. This time the recommendation was somewhat different. It stated that:

If the approval of 24 Goodlet Street was satisfactory at the time and 30 Goodlet Street is very similar then it would usually follow that 30 Goodlet Street should be approved unless there has been changed circumstances. In design terms I doubt that there are any significant distinguishing issues. They are, for the purpose of the exercise, the same. The only changing factor is the question of Public Interest. Public Interest is a point of consideration under Section 79C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and one that we are legally obliged to take into consideration.

Public Interest in this case was evidenced according to the Director by the number of submissions, the letter of the Minister and the progress as to the new proposed code. Accordingly it was stated that:

> *'Public Interest' is a complex point of consideration which requires the weighing of varying and often dissimilar matters. As can be seen from some of the factors mentioned in this particular case, there are conflicting views. The question of introducing consideration of factors that have occurred after lodgement of the application is an issue that also needs to be clarified. There is considerable legal uncertainty in how much weight should be given to the various factors. As Public Interest is the only variable factor that distinguishes this application from the approval of 24 Goodlet Street, I would suggest that we should be seeking legal advice on this issue.*
>
> *If it is considered that 'Public Interest' has not progressed sufficiently then the application should be approved subject to suitable conditions.'*

The recommendation adopted by Council was that legal advice be sought to establish the legal weight of consideration to be given to the 'Public Interest' with this application, given the circumstances of the case. There is no doubt that the DA will then be approved barring something extraordinary in the legal advice. Meanwhile the draft proposed code is still to come to Council (and is likely to be rejected). The heritage study for the area is still uncompleted. Interestingly there have now been some moves by some councillors in Ashfield Council to extend their boundaries to cover Ashbury.

The Council

Like most Councils, Canterbury has a small number of elected councillors elected from particular wards. There are three wards which elect three councillors each. There is a Mayor elected by the residents of the council area as a whole. Two of the councillors are real estate agents. None have architectural qualifications. Four are in their first term. Each councillor is paid about $200 per week for their efforts which generally take place after their working hours end. The total budget for councillors per year is $147 000. By comparison the council has a budget of some $76 million and a wages bill of about $27 million. The imbalance in knowledge and expertise between the officers and the councillors is palpable. To compound the difficulties, meeting are not often conducive to dealing with matters in a dispassionate basis. Meetings over controversial DAs are often emotionally and politically charged. The decisions made by councillors will often have an impact on their public image and their financial and political support.

From a purely democratic perspective, there is much truth to the argument that was happened in Goodlet St. was simply an exercise in democracy. Such a perspective would see the councillors representing the support of the residents for a largely non interventionist approach on development as reflected in the Council code which had been accepted years before by the Council. The council officers give advice which could be rejected or accepted. The objectors simply didn't reflect a majority view.

Such a view overly simplifies the democratic process. It does not take account of the fact that no councillor adopted a public position at the election either in favour or against developments such as the Goodlet St. one. It is difficult to establish a democratic mandate in such a process. It does not take into account the lack of knowledge of planning principles, let alone the legislative framework, of many councillors. It also fails to recognise how the mark of a sophisticated democracy is the protection given to its minorities.

What could be done?

Despite the concerns expressed above, I do believe in councils being governed by the elected officials. This process of government should however be a transparent and informed process and much needs to be done before this can be guaranteed. In particular, it is ludicrous to expect (at best) part time, largely untrained councillors with no independent advice to adequately assess often complex developments. While the expansion of expert advice (from planning boards to non government advisory bodies) is a useful step in this process, I do not believe that the situation will ever really change until the resource base for councillors changes and the debate about issues such as planning and heritage becomes a public one.

In terms of the former, councillors need to be paid enough to be able to afford to spend the time necessary on their public duties. It is hard to argue that large councils such as Canterbury could not afford to pay a reasonable salary to its councillors and expect in return a full time commitment to the task. Unfortunately such a position seems to have been specifically rejected by the Remuneration Tribunal which has strongly supported the notion of councillors imbued by voluntarism who set the policy and leave the 'guidance and/or control of such policy matters' and the day to day running of the Council to the officers.

The problem of councillor amateurism is exacerbated by the structure of local government in NSW. Many small councils are resource starved yet manage to duplicate the resources of their neighbours. Their boundaries are often justified only by history. Canterbury is a good example. Parts of the suburb of Ashfield are within Canterbury Council and Canterbury Boys High School lies within the boundaries of Ashfield. One end of Goodlet Street is in Canterbury while the other is in Ashfield. Despite this, the State Government has shown no great enthusiasm for local government consolidation.

A major reform must also surely be to balance the scales between developers and objectors. Developers are given the option of multiple appeals on merit grounds against council decisions. Objectors are given none. Developers are allowed to donate to individual councillors and their political parties. A comparatively minor donation during an election campaign can give the donor significant influence if and when their development comes to Council. Paul Keating is right to call for a ban on such donations.

In terms of planning and heritage, I think that a number of groups have a responsibility to lift the level of debate. Those bodies obviously include the State Government Departments but they also include groups like the National Trust, the Heritage Council, local Historical societies and resident groups. They also include the media, particularly suburban and ethnic newspapers. Many of these bodies are somewhat disconnected from public debate.

Much of the public debate about architecture, planning and heritage occurs in a rarefied, often inner urban, atmosphere. As difficult as it is, those groups have to engage themselves in a broader political debate. They need to encourage better design. They need to encourage a greater regard for the history and future of our whole city.

Finally on a more technocratic basis, the State Government needs to seriously examine the planning process that allows councils to adopt codes that merely provide for a numerical checklist for approval.

Most importantly I think that the bodies that I have mentioned need to look beyond the confines of the inner city. The suburbs that I represent may not have the same financial wealth of the suburbs of the North, the East and the South but they do have a cultural wealth that should not be underestimated. They should not be consigned to inferior design and planning because they exist beyond the view of the inner city or the North Shore. They deserve the same level of attention and care as that demanded by their more affluent neighbours.

References

1 See the register at www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/building/heritage.htm

2 see http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/building/dwelling.htm for a copy of the code)

3 see www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/council/meetings/2002/obus2401.htm#_Toc535999495 for a discussion of the delegation system).

4 see http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/council/meetings/2001/cdbus0802.htm for the complete report)'

5 see www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/council/meetings/2001/omin2202.htm

6 see http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/council/meetings/2001/cdbus0908.htm

7 see http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/lecreview/) 475286)

Ian Latham is a councillor on Canterbury Council and has been since 1989. He studied Arts/Law at the Australian National University. He works as a barrister specialising in industrial and criminal law. Prior to that he was a union official for a number of years. He has published articles in the Federal Law review and the Alternative Law Journal. He is married with two children and lives in Earlwood. His council web site can be found at http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/latham/index.htm

Canberra: The Role of Distory®in Recent Suburban Architecture - a snapshot

Trevor Creighton

Abstract

The use of historical references in architecture is not new. From Mannerism to Post Modernity, architects have recycled the past. This paper looks specifically at the rhetorical content of 'historical' motifs in the context of recent architectural trends in suburban Canberra. The purpose here is not to claim that historical reference in architecture is in any way a new phenomenon. Rather, Trevor Creighton proposes a hypothesis for interpreting the mechanism through which this style articulates its appeal to the individual via 'theming', arguably the great cultural leitmotiv of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This is less a critique of the stylistic trends embodied in these architectural trends than an attempt to uncover the roots of the rhetorical content of the buildings themselves.

This paper related to a body of photographic images (shown as a slide projection which will cycle through a series of approximately 20 images during the talk) which have been developing on new suburban developments within Canberra. The images reflected 15 years practice as both a visual artist and commercial architectural photographer and are unapologetically documentary and unrhetorical in their style. Only selected images are shown with this text.

The use of historical references in architecture is not new. From Mannerism to Post Modernity, architects have recycled the past. In this paper I will look specifically at the rhetorical content of 'historical' motifs in the context of recent architectural trends in suburban Canberra. My purpose here is not to claim that historical reference in architecture is in any way a novel phenomenon. Rather, I will propose a hypothesis for understanding how current themed 'historical' trends in architecture appeal to people. This will be less a critique of the aesthetic merits of the architecture than an attempt to uncover the roots of the rhetorical content of the buildings themselves.

I have approached this study as a photographer, a visual artist concerned with appearances as well as meaning. It was the external, the visual content of recent Canberra suburban domestic buildings and developments that piqued my curiosity, stimulated a desire to better understand the nature of the visual signals that these dwellings must articulate to those who buy them. To an extent then, it is probably fair to describe this work as superficial – at least in so far as what I am dealing with are appearances. From these appearances I attempt, perhaps unwisely, to extrapolate the meaning of the form and the attraction that form/meaning nexus exerts on those who consume it. I freely admit that the hypotheses offered in this paper are partial and contingent. Nevertheless, I believe that this analysis and the conclusions it draws are worthwhile if only as a conduit for debate and continued investigation into the interrelations between people and the built environment.

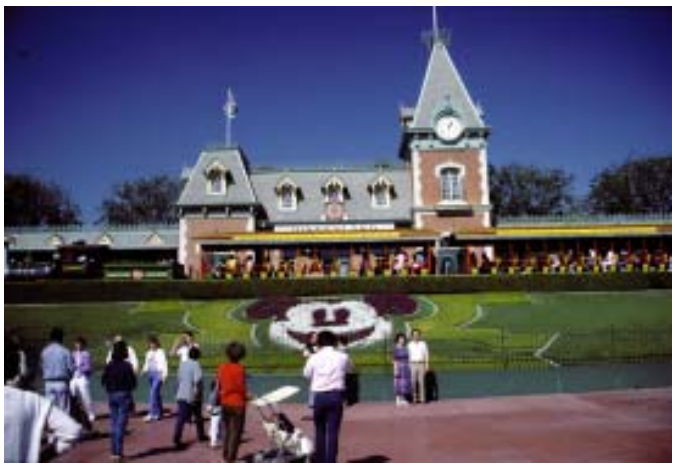
Encountering Architecture

It would be an elegant thing to say that my first conscious encounter with the rhetoric of architecture happened about 16 years ago, at an amusement park in Anaheim, California. An elegant thing because history itself has so often been written as a shorthand, rhetorical device, in order to persuade the reader of the utility of the writer's (the historian's) point of view. This narrative approach to history often relies upon the conceit of a 'great encounter' (the moment of enlightenment) as a means of concisely, if seldom accurately, illustrating how great ideas are formed and quantum leaps made.

The process by which I became aware that architecture has a rhetoric was lengthier and more complex than the encounter paradigm can possibly accommodate. As Ben Macintyre remarked in the Times recently, '*History is too untidy to be reduced to a series of turning points*'.[1] But the utility of my Damascene experience in Californian in this discussion is due both to the germ of truth it contains and as a cipher for the telling of history as impoverished, decontextualised narrative – about which I will soon speak.

The theme park was, of course, Disneyland. I wasn't visiting Disneyland in 1986 as part of any quixotic architectural quest; I was there because I had grown up in the 1960s with Mickey, Donald, Goofy, Pluto and, of course, kindly, jovial Walt - all so happy in their monochrome Magic Kingdom every Sunday night. This was a fantasy I simply had so see, to experience and to live, because childhood with Disneyland (the television show) was not merely entertainment – it was an open invitation, an exhortation, to visit the happiest kingdom of them all. So 1986 saw me finally making my life complete. I suspended all cynicism and enjoyed every minute of my pilgrimage even, I'll admit, on the 'It's a small World After All' ride, suitable for ages 2 – 7.

There was, however, one themed attraction that I found to be quite without point. In fact, I didn't consider it an attraction at all. No rides, no jolly cartoon characters to have my photograph taken with, just retail outlets and a collection of bucolic, vaguely turn of the 19th Century, American architecture. 'Main Street USA' was, in my eyes, an inexplicable dud.



Canberra

I didn't move to Canberra immediately after I returned from Anaheim. In the intervening period I began photographing architecture. I developed an interest in architecture, first from an aesthetic perspective then, increasingly, in the rhetorical aspect of architecture. Over that same period I experienced a comparable change in the nature of the architecture in which I was interested; away from the exquisite and exotic and towards the humble and mundane. I have come to appreciate Canberra for the suburban city that it is. I stroll, like Walter Benjamin, except that I am not drawn from one interesting encounter to another by the promise of difference, but by that of similarity. Indeed, in these newest suburban developments it is precisely this homogeneity which interests me.

Background to New Developments

Over the past 4 or 5 years there has been a boom in the real estate sector in Canberra. This has coincided with, and partially been fuelled by, the release of new land by the Territory legislature and an upswing in medium density infill development. There are arguments, at times quite heated, for and against increasing the housing density in Canberra. What intrigues me, however, is not this debate, but the uniformity of the architecture represented in the majority of these new dwellings and developments. The recycling of a number of architectural motifs linked with 'early' Canberra (ca. 1926-1939) is one prominent, recurrent theme. These include red terracotta tiles, crows-step gabling and related façade embellishments, fanlight windows, John Smith Murdoch's Old Parliament House radial motif, applied like a decal here and there, and a range of other devices with which a Canberran of a few years standing would likely be familiar – even if only at a subconscious level. Other examples of architectural detailing incorporate yet other motifs of a quasi-historical nature, though decontextualised and in a less site-specific visual language. In this vein, there are vague references to things 'Arcadian', incorporating putative influences from Tuscany or Provence, even if only in the naming of the estate or building. Significantly these latter references are suffused with notions of history and rusticity and I consider them a closely related sub-theme of the same phenomenon.

A significant subset of this new housing boom and its recycled motifs are housing clusters – new estate developments which site a considerable number of dwellings on a smallish area of land. These developments are the result of the policy of land release adopted under the Territory Plan whereby substantial parcels of land are sold by the territory to a single developer. The Territory's Planning and Land Management division (PALM), an arm of the Department of Urban Services mandates street layout, plot size and other infrastructure considerations. The single developer submits a plan and, after approval (perhaps after modification/s suggested by PALM) the plan is implemented and the development constructed in a single phase, or in multiple phases within a fairly short time frame. What results is often less than a suburb, as such, but much more than a few streets. Perimeter fencing and the occasional use of a faux entrance gate (this, of course, historically derived) lends an air of the self-contained to these estate-style developments but they seldom incorporate shops and frequently rely on adjoining public lands for recreational space. As such it is worth noting that this style of development is to be differentiated from the bigger-picture development of Canberra as a series of interconnected satellite town centres. These smaller developments, with which I am principally concerned, form subsets of the larger urban centres, sometimes within the hub of the satellite town centres, sometimes on or somewhat beyond the periphery.

The architecture within the developments conforms to a tightly-framed style, dictated by the developer's plan. These patterns, moreover, repeat to a substantial degree across a significant number of the new developments, lending a sense of pervading homogeneity to new Canberran housing stock (recent infill developments – single and multiple occupancy – follow an identical trend) with colours muted and consistent across the development. Often these developments have a name – a themed title ('Heritage Corner', 'The Oaks', 'Bruce Ridge'). In conjunction with perimeter fencing this serves to delimit them – psychologically as much as it does physically - from their surroundings. If I can be permitted a neologism I should like to call this approach to suburban development 'Enclavism'.

The rhetorical 'promise' of the new Canberra development is of conformity: architectural conformity equals social conformity. Apartments, villas and houses articulate this through references to a history that never was. They speak of 1926 when, we are to imagine, the world had found peace (however short-lived), prosperity and Australia had a new capital and the White Australia policy. Or of an eternal, Elysian afternoon in a far off place and time – again utterly devoid of contemporary complexity and anxieties. What these gable-ended confections are truly expressing is a turning away from the future and a deep sense of anxiety about difference, change and complexity in the contemporary world – perhaps encapsulated in the oft-heard catch cry 'loss of community/values'. And, it must be stated clearly, this pattern of development well and truly predates the Tampa and September 11th. We've reached the point at which I think the Disney, Main Street USA analogy becomes relevant. For how can we escape reality except through substitution with fantasy? And if there has been one organisation which can claim success using this very substitution as its *raison d'être* it is surely Disney Corporation.

In the opening chapter of Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance, edited by Karal Ann Marling, Marty Sklar (then Vice-Chairman of Walt Disney Imagineering) wrote

> '*With…a faithful reproduction of Main Street appearing in the first design, the park [Disneyland] was to be a soothing reminiscence of the all-American small town, home to parent-teacher associations, Boy Scout troupes, Rotary clubs, and science fairs*'.[2] Further... '*Harper [Goff's][3] concepts for Main Street …established the fact that a story would be told by architectural facades and interior designs*' (my emphasis).

In terms of rhetorical content, then, is there any difference between Mainstreet USA and the new Enclavist architecture of Canberra? If the answer to this question is 'no', what does that say about our society? Perhaps Stephen J Fjellman's evaluation of contemporary society and to whit the appeal of Disney holds yet another key:

> '*The division of labor [sic] ... has led to increasing segmentation of a society* ***whose people are held together by an increasingly diluted set of collective values***'[4] (my emphasis).

If one accepts Fjellman's assertion, then the tendency towards homogeneity in Canberra's new housing stock can plausibly be seen as an attempt in brick and tile to counterbalance societal fragmentation, or at least to give an appearance of so doing. If this conjecture on my part is correct then it surely follows that (at least some of) the people who buy these new dwellings, especially those in the enclaves, are motivated by a desire to be part of an idealised 'community' which is to be achieved through the consumption of material metaphors (houses) which speak of an agreed collective memory of 'better times'. Fjellman again… "*... in 'Habits of the Heart' Robert Bellah and his associates found among Americans they interviewed a longing for some way of making sense of their lives.*" Bellah *et al* go on to argue that a solution to this problem – which they identify as rooted in the breakdown of shared, traditional U.S. discourses – biblical and republican – is to establish a "'*community of memory'… this community would provide people with a social group and social purpose that would reconnect them with one another and with* ***some sense of the past. This community of memory would provide a shared tradition out of which would arise an ethic for meaningful activity in the world",***[5] (my emphasis).

And *if* community is held to be valued as an ideal but fragmented (at best) as a reality by many of us who live in contemporary Western Capitalist society, then it is understandable that many people will be eager to find ways to reconstruct (some sense of) community. The problem here is that communities are organic, partly symbolic entities which grow (or not) under certain conditions – they cannot be mandated (by, for instance, developers or local government authorities) much less purchased as a material entity. But in a world where we are socialised into believing that everything is available at a price, is this a fact which is no longer obvious? '*The construction of life through the consumption of commodities – the symbolic forms of which are far more important than their various contents – is clearly the solution to anxiety late capitalism depends on and promotes*'?[6] We shouldn't be surprised, then, that the symbolic substitutions for real communities take the form/s of consumer commodities, namely houses.

Theming

The new Suburban Canberra, especially the Enclaves, are themed environments, built of the same intellectual framework as a Hollywood movie (this is more than a set, though perhaps yet less than reality). The filmic nature of the environment is manifest in precisely the quasi-historical facades already discussed. Lawns - such as they had room to exist between extensive swathes of faux-pavement patterned concrete - are manicured and houses likewise. There is a *Truman Show* ambience to it all.

As I have already argued, the desire for and consumption of a themed environment implies a desire to escape one's reality. In the case of the *Theme Park*, only temporarily, but when one makes a themed environment home, this reflects a desire to make the escape become more long-term. And a desire to escape suggests something that one feels impelled to escape *from*. To escape from something which is dull? Inferior? Or, perhaps, confusing and threatening – dangerous? To escape, of course, also means that the *other* must be held at bay, physically or, at least, conceptually.

Inside the Enclave

A number of the Enclave developments take the form of fenced or walled semi-compounds. That is to say, they are not walled communities as such, but deter the casual ambler through a combination of physical barriers (walls and fences) and implied surveillance. Surveillance is implicit in the clustered design of the Enclave, making (historical) architectural reference as it does to the fortress or compound. The 'compound' is superficially readily penetrable via non-gated entrances, however the psychological barriers are likely to represent a subtler and more persuasive challenge to uninvited visitors. There is a glazed Rubicon of windows filled with potential gazes to cross before one can enter the Enclave. These suburban developments present themselves much like Afrikaner lagers, huddled on the Veldt in fear of ever-imminent attack.

Once inside the perimeter the sense of surveillance continues, perhaps intensifies. And it is a form of surveillance which seems directed within as much as without. An unuttered, mutual surveillance which ensures that lawns will be mowed and appropriate colour schemes selected when the time comes to redecorate. Part of this air of the panopticon is perhaps due to the socio-economic makeup of the communities which coalesce around these housing developments. I must make an assumption here that I can't back up with research at this point. I deduce from the price of housing (these are not low-cost developments and in some cases command premium prices, well above the median house

price for Canberra), the cars and the people I see in the streets that this is very much the province of middle-income middle-Australia. As there are a variety of housing options available in comparable price brackets, I further assume that the people who live here, in the main, choose to live here – i.e. there is something about the nature of the development which appeals, beyond the exigencies of price and proximity to workplace (because in Canberra, these latter requirements could readily be obtained in other places). So I am proposing that, at least a substantial proportion of, the sub-sector of society which exists within these Enclaves takes comfort from the cohesiveness engendered by the uniformity of its surroundings – homogeneity of architecture reflects the desire to conform in the individual or vice-versa. Furthermore, this homogeneity is re-reflected to the visitor: stated in the rhetorical component of the built environment, if you don't like it, get out.

Conclusions

There are several factors that I have so far identified as being articulated by the visual content of these recent Canberran dwellings and developments: a desire to look back towards some form of poorly-defined 'golden age' on the part of the consumer of new-Canberra, and to purchase the values and social constructs believed associated with that age through the acquisition of a particular *type* of house, perhaps in a particular *type* of estate. In the case of these estates, there are also the tandem desires to live *securely* within a community (of like and like minded individuals). Somewhat ironically, the posited *Community* within the Enclave necessitates keeping *the rest* of the community at bay.

Are there any other factors which might be at play in structuring what is built and what is bought? Neil Harris, in *Expository Exposition (Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, p.27) suggests that Disney was successful in large part because he/it concentrated on 'abandoning high-minded ambitions in favour of the existing taste of his customers ... endowing visitors with a new vision of themselves, lending dignity to the commercial culture that had been feeding their hearts and minds for so many decades'.[7] Is this, then, also the key to the success of new Canberra? Does this mean that the long struggle by architects and urban planners for integrity and those 'high-minded ambitions' is, and always was, doomed to fail? Perhaps Disney again offers an answer, and it is a bleak one. The EPCOT Centre at Walt Disney World in Florida was originally the brainchild of Walt himself. He conceived it in truly Utopian terms, as proof that '*the problems of present-day America were not beyond solution*'.[8] EPCOT, built in 1982, long after Walt's death in 1966, became little more than a cross between World's fair and shopping mall '*with one section devoted to corporate pavilions and another to national product shows, housed in replicas of the Eiffel Tower [and] the Piazza San Marco*'.[9] Just another themed, retail world.

It would be incorrect, even unjust to dismiss the concerns and anxieties which, I have maintained, as illusory. Undoubtedly the world is a complex and at times dangerous place. All manner of factors place stresses upon us in our daily lives – work, societal interrelationships, money and a constant bombardment with (usually bad) news. It would be similarly erroneous to suggest that the *only* factors which drive people to purchase this type of housing – in the mode of consumer lemmings[10], devoid of free will – are inherent in the architectural rhetoric. There are very many practical

reasons why, for example, individuals will choose new houses over old, or to live in a cluster of houses, rather than on the quarter acre dream (e.g. minimum lawn maintenance).

Indeed there is a short supply of new housing being built in Canberra which doesn't conform to the stylistic trends I have highlighted. But builders build what they believe consumers want - what will sell – and sell it does. I believe that the ideas I have presented here offer an insight into *some* of the driving factors behind Canberra's current architectural crop. And beyond merely providing a snapshot of contemporary housing development in Canberra, I intend that this paper should sound a cautionary note. Because the danger in this trend is not without, but within. Community *cannot be purchased* – it can only be built, lived and breathed by individuals (much like that other leitmotiv of developer's themed sloganeering, *lifestyle*). Security, on the other hand, *can* be purchased – but at what cost? More elaborate perimeter fencing, replete with razor wire and armed guards? And the isolation of the other, as undesirable? What hope *community* then? But we needn't extrapolate to possible, future scenarios to see a great sadness in all this. If what I have said holds water, then what is implicit is that we, as a society and as individuals, have reached the point where we are no longer able to distinguish between that which can be purchased and that which cannot. The point at which we can no longer see how to obtain anything in any other way than through consumption. Perhaps it is too unkind, though not entirely without foundation, to quote again from Neil Harris. Are we trying to obtain through the purchase of real estate '*…the land of the happy ending, bereft…. of critical intelligence, a traditional class structure, good taste, and a willingness to face unpleasant facts."?*[11] Is this the impetus driving consumers of new Canberra? The lure of purchasing a 'world' without cares or consequences, a piece of the good old days, where difference was unknown and everyone lived in a universe of simple harmony, through shared values, skin colour and sexual preference – a world without complexity. A world which never existed.

References

1 Ben Macintyre. The Australian. Wednesday, January 30th 2002. Higher Education Supplement, p.24. Reproduced from The Times.

2 Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance: Karal Ann Marling ed. Marty Sklar, then Vice-Chairman and Principal Creative Executive, Walt Disney Imagineering. Quoted from October 1, 1996, on the occasion of Walt Disney World's 25th Anniversary.

3 Ibid. p.15. Harper Goff was an illustrator employed by Walt Disney in 1951. He was responsible for some of the original concept sketches for 'Main Street'. Main Street, as rendered by Goff, was drawn in 'the predominant style of Fort Collins, Colorado, where Goff had grown up…. It was photographs of the local courthouse there (and not some distant memory of Marceline [Walt's Missouri home town], he maintained, that provided the specific model for Disneyland's City Hall'. Marling, Karal Ann ed. *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, p.61.

4 Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America: p.42.

5 Ibid. p. 56 -7, citing Robert Bellah, Richard Madison, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidker, and Stephen M. Tipton, "Habits of the Heart and Commitment in American Life" New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

6 Ibid. p. 38.

7 Neil Harris, in Expository Exposition: Designing Disney's Theme Parks, p.27

8 Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance: Karal Ann Marling ed. Karal Ann Marling's Imagineering the Disney Theme, p.31.

9 Op cit.

10 Even the popular concept of the lemming is down to Disney, I'm afraid. In an early Disney nature film, the crew apparently took lemmings (a non-migratory sub-species, I believe) and threw them into the water (out of view of the camera, which filmed only the hapless, involuntary tumbling of the creatures) for the benefit of the narrative.

11 Again, From Neil Harris's Expository Expositions in Designing Disney's Theme Parks, The Architecture of Reassurance: p.26. Harris was actually making reference to critical thinking about Los Angeles early in the 20th Century. But Disney Inc. have done nothing but attempt to distill the "California Dream" into a pure essence and it is this essence of controlled escapism which is fuelling current Canberran development.

Bibliography

Beahan, Virginia; McPhee, Laura. *No Ordinary Land*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1998

Drew, Philip. Veranda: *Embracing Place*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson - Harper Collins, 1992.

Duby, Georges (ed.). *A History of Private Life* (3 vols.). Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1988.

Fjellman, Stephen J. *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, Westview Press, Boulder Co.: 1992

Foucault, M. Power James D. Faubion (ed.), Robert Hurley et al (trans.). London: Allen Lane 1994.

Fyfe, Nicholas R. (ed.). *Images of the Street. Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*. London: Routledge, 1998

Lefebvre, Henri. *Production of Space*. Cambridge: Blackwell. 1991

Marling, Karal Ann, ed.: *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*: Canadian Centre for Architecture Montreal/Flammarion Paris: 1997.

Misrach, Richard. *Violent Legacies*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1992

Paetzold, Heinz (ed.). *City Life. Essays on Urban Culture*. Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1997

Pickett, Charles. *The fibro frontier: A different history of Australian Architecture*. Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 1997

Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana, 1995

Wright, Bruce. *Cornerstone of the Capital: A History of Public Housing in Canberra.* Canberra: ACT Housing, 2000

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Anthony Burton and colleagues at the Planning Policy Section, Territory Planning Branch, Planning and Land Management, Dame Pattie Menzies House, Dickson ACT for their generous input.

Trevor Creighton is based in Canberra with 20 years experience as a visual artist. He is a commercial photographer and teacher, currently teaching part-time at the Canberra Institute of Technology and at the Canberra School of Arts Photomedia Department, Australian National University, while pursuing his interests as a practising visual artist

Your style or your life: Houses as Sites of Memory

Sue Webber

Abstract

As the exterior of the suburban house and garden comes under the pressure of neighbourly observation to conform, the interior fights a rear guard action as a final site of memory, individuality and identity.

This paper considers the role of the suburban domestic interior as site of memory through photographs, objects and the surface marks that detail events. As fewer and fewer people have access to the house of their childhood, as they move from house to house and city to city, objects come to stand as symbols for memories and continuity. How do suburban dwellers integrate these symbolic objects into the dream of the '*House and Gardens*' interior? Can grandmother's chest of drawers live in a Freedom bedroom?

Will the suburban interior echo its exterior – a shallow reflection of an advertised lifestyle? Or can it still develop as a treasure house, a fully charged battery of life's memories?

Uniformity in house design is nothing new. You can see it in the Georgian terraces of Bath, in the serried rows of Victorian workers' houses in Newtown and through the repetitive streets of the post-war suburbs.

I grew up in a post-war suburb south of London where I could have spent my formative years believing that there was only one design for housing. I do not recall ever thinking about the exteriors of my neighbours' houses, what fascinated me was the private domain of the interior. Like Carter's entry to Tutankhamun's tomb, each new interior was a treasure trove for me to explore.

New smells, unfamiliar foods, babies, work clothes and new household scents of detergents, soaps and cleaners tantalised my nose. There were new colours and textures to see and feel, different states of order and disorder, a new set of rules about where to play and with what, and new foods to consume; a tropical flavour cordial or a snack of unsalted peanuts and raisins.

This world of interiors forcefully and intimately expressed the lives of the families that inhabited them. Visiting these houses expanded my childhood horizons in a way the monotonous exterior landscape never could. I can recall my childhood home and mentally visit each room. I lived there for 15 years but I cannot place my memory of the interior easily in its chronological context. It has merged into a memory space where objects coexist that never shared the rooms in real time.

If I could revisit the past and, like a spirit, return to my childhood, I would choose Christmas Eve in the late 1960s. My bedroom has been lent to my grandparents for the night and I am tucked into a campbed in the front room. This is no loss to me, the front room is the place of Christmas itself. The decorated tree sparkles in its multi-coloured lights with the fairy at the top where I placed her. Now, I'm lying under the tree and she looks down. A Christmas crib with its animals is in the corner and the smells of past meals mingle with the scent of the pages of the quarto-sized books that live on the floor near my bed. There is a huge volume of stories illustrated by Doré. I don't read the stories, instead I look at the pictures enjoying a frisson of fear amid my happiness. Tomorrow it will be Christmas but the anticipation and my special place beneath the lights of the tree eclipses the delights of Christmas Days in my memory.

This image exists only inside my head, I have no talisman to take me back, no object to jog my subconscious in to that space. What would work? The fairy from the treetop? Or, perhaps more powerfully, that dusty volume of Doré engravings, the counterpoint to my joy and anticipation. My ghost of Christmas past would choose the book to bring back to the present.

Sadly, we cannot reach back into our histories to retrieve those talismanic objects when their importance is realised. Instead, we choose which objects to carry forward, hoping that their symbolism will stimulate the vivid spots of memory to recreate a time, space or mood.

These are the objects that are precious by association, precious beyond monetary value. No insurance payout can replace them. In most houses these objects are few and we do not choose to live surrounded by a tangible past like Miss Havisham, a ghost at her own wedding feast. However when we do make places our own these objects provide continuity, identity and individuality in a way a non-talismanic object can never do.

So why are these memories important?
Gary Taylor in his book *Cultural Selection* says,

> '*Memory, the mother of the Muses, is also the mother of self: we are what we remember…Every identity, personal or ethnic or national, is founded upon memory; our egos and our societies are sustained by the circulation of recollection.*'[1]

Memory is the foundation of identity but our storage systems are far from perfect. There are the voluntary memories: things I can choose to recall at will like the rooms in my parent's house. Objects can be used like signposts to these voluntary memories, they are something that reminds us how to get to somewhere we've been before and want to visit again.

Then there are the involuntary memories that seem to be stored in a place that can only be reached by a trigger: a sound, a smell, an object. This trigger takes us back to a place where we have been before but have forgotten how to return to.

As Esther Salaman wrote,

> *'There is another kind of memory of experience, which comes unexpectedly, suddenly, and brings back a past moment accompanied by strong emotions, so that a 'then' becomes a 'now'.'*[2]

The novelist, Helen Garner describes the experience,

> '*about two years ago, I was dully walking along a Sydney street, worrying about nothing in particular, when – boom! I was small. I was turning the corner past the tankstand and putting my hand out to push open the back door of the Ocean Grove house. It was made of diagonal latticed slats painted dark green and rough to the touch. I nearly keeled over with the vividness of that door. It came from nowhere. It hadn't entered my mind for over forty years.*'[3]

These memories can be especially powerful and vivid. They are often pleasurable experiences and ones that we may wish to repeat. For this reason the object, sound or smell, the trigger for the unexpected memory becomes important. It becomes a talisman, a key to a lost world. Once the trigger for an involuntary memory is established it allows voluntary access to the memory. The signpost is established and return is made easier.

When these special objects are gathered together in a home, the whole house becomes a battery of memories charged with the identities of its inhabitants. The objects become what Csikszentminalyi and Rochberg-Halton call both an echo and a reinforcement of people's goals.[4]

In their study of what things people considered to be important in their homes they found that, 'One of the most important psychological purposes of the home is that those objects that have shaped one's personality and which are needed to express concretely those aspects of the self that one values are kept within it. Thus the home is not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful.'[5]

So the objects within the home have a deeper meaning than the functional. They are used to trigger memories and to reinforce identity.

It is not just the objects that have this power. The floors, walls, doors and ceilings can talk too. A friend told me about a pattern of marks high on the walls of his parents' kitchen. Each time he visited they triggered the memory of his return home as a small boy with a bleeding knee. His call for sympathy was cut short as the contents of the saucepan on the stove exploded, spattering the walls and ceiling and taking his mother's attention with them.

This is what is lost when we no longer have access to the houses where we grew up or when a bush fire claims a house or a dam takes a town. We loose some of the triggers to our memories, we loose a paragraph in our identity. Even when we move house we take our important objects and look for new ones to symbolise the new experiences that we want to remember. In our new homes we try to recreate ourselves though the objects we bring from the past, creating a sense of continuity though memory.

However, these objects must struggle for their survival. From the early days of white settlement Australia has been a mail order society: furniture from England and catalogues from Beard Watson's Sydney store. You could furnish your home from top to bottom with all new matching items, and you still can, just take a look at today's Freedom and Ikea catalogues.

The secret message of the object, its role as a depth charge to memory, is the antithesis of these spaces where identity can be bought and arranged as a conscious stage set to perform an encoded life. Objects, colours and arrangements are symbolic messages ready for the audience to read and interpret with a language learned and shared through television and publications. This is an interior world of surfaces coded for performance not for reflection.

Like the changing scenery of a drama, the interior must change with the style otherwise the message of fashion will become a message of outdatedness. The objects are impermanent. There is no need for durability because they will be replaced as the scene changes.

But is this a satisfying way to live? In his study of Home, Rybcznski says,

> '*Hominess is not neatness, otherwise everyone would live in replicas of the kinds of sterile and impersonal homes that appear in interior-designed and architectural magazines. What these spotless rooms lack, or what crafty photographers have carefully removed, is any evidence of human occupation. In spite of their artfully placed vases and casually arranged art books, the imprint of their inhabitants is missing.*'[6]

As the pressure mounts to consume and conform, the interior of the suburban house fights a rear guard action against the repetitive exterior. This is the battle for identity and memory and our talismanic objects face the full force of the guided missiles of lifestyle advertising.

Will the suburban interior echo its exterior – a shallow reflection of an advertised lifestyle? Or can it still develop as a treasure house, a fully charged battery life's memories?

References

1 G. Taylor, *Cultural Selection*, Basic Books, Harper Collins, New York, 1996, p.15.
2 E. Salaman, *A Collection of Moments, A study of Involuntary Memories*, Longman, London, 1970, p. 11.
3 H. Garner, *The Feel of Steel*, Picador, Sydney, 2001, p. 5.
4 M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton, *The meaning of things: domestic symbols and the self*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 141.
5 ibid., p. 139.
6 W. Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Penguin, 1986, p.17.

Bibliography

Csikszentmihalyi, Milhaly and Rochberg-Halton, Eugene, *The meaning of things: domestic symbols and the self*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Garner, Helen, *The Feel of Steel*, Picador, Sydney, 2001.

Kavanagh, Gaynor, *Dream Spaces*, *Memory and the Museum*, Leicester University Press, 2000.

Lowenthal, David, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997.

Maleuvre, Didier, *Museum Memories*, Stanford University Press, USA, 1999.

Read, Peter, *Returning to Nothing: the meaning of lost places*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rybczynski, Witold, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Penguin, 1986.

Salaman, Esther, *A Collection of Moments, A study of Involuntary Memories*, Longman, London, 1970.

Samuel, Raphael, *Theatres of Memory*, Verso, London 1994.

Taylor, Gary, *Cultural Selection*, Basic Books, Harper Collins, New York, 1996.

White, Richard and Russell, Penny (eds) *Memories and Dreams. Reflections on 20th Century Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1997.

Sue Webber is a Masters candidate in Cultural Heritage Management at the University of Canberra, currently researching, Houses as sites of Memory. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Local and Applied History from the University of New England, 2000. Museum Assistant, Lanyon Homestead, ACT Historic Places, Cultural Facilities Corporation. From a childhood fascination with other people's houses she became a regular contributor to *Country Style* magazine which gave her an opportunity to visit a wide variety of homes and talk to their owners about them.

As a migrant to Australia she was acutely aware of the limited choice of objects and photographs she could bring to her new home. These objects symbolise her grandparents, her parents and the houses of her childhood. Now as a student of history and historic places she has an opportunity to develop an insight into other people's relationships with the past through the triggers to memory offered by houses, objects, smells, tastes and touch.

Urban Space in the Suburbs: The Pacific Highway and Sydney's Upper North Shore

Nancy Cushing

Abstract

While suburbs have served as, and have been criticised for being, places of retreat, in order to be viable they must have connections to the city at large. Some of these connections are physical through services such as electrical supply, sewerage and transport. Containing those connections, sequestering their potential contamination of the private sphere, has been a priority of suburban residents over the past century.

This paper focuses on the Pacific Highway as one of the vital urban intrusions into the suburbia of Sydney's North Shore. The establishment of the road along the ridge line antedates suburban development, allowing timber getters to follow in the footsteps of the Indigenous inhabitants. The railway of the 1890s permitted residential occupation of the area. Rail and road followed similar paths, entwining with one another to create a transport corridor through the centre of the district. In the late 1920s, the Lane Cove Road was upgraded into the Pacific Highway in preparation for the increased traffic flows from the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened in 1932.

The Pacific Highway's role in Sydney's upper North Shore suburbs is a reminder that although the suburbs are distinctive places, they remain integral elements of a larger city. While suburban rhetoric emphasises difference and distance, the city reaches out, threatening the suburban peace, but allowing residents to enjoy aspects of urban life without leaving their home districts. The rail and road corridor is an urban space extending lineally through suburbia.

Suburbs have served as, and have been criticised for being, places of retreat from the outside world, where home and family, peace and quiet are privileged. However, in order to be viable, suburbs must have connections outward to the city at large. Physically, electrical wires, sewerage pipes, rail lines and roads, sustain the suburban ideal by tethering it securely to the urban whole. Culturally, suburbanites remain people of the city. Their desires for a sense of community, place identity and ritual are also played out largely with reliance on urban forms. Managing these necessary connections with the city, enjoying their benefits but sequestering their potential contamination of the private sphere, has been a priority of residents of Australian suburbs since their creation in the 1820s.

This paper will focus on the Pacific Highway as one of the vital urban intrusions into the suburbia of Sydney's Upper North Shore, specifically, the Ku-ring-gai Local Government Area.[1] Ku-ring-gai from the 1890s has been an exclusive middle class suburban area where both physical and cultural distance from the city are counted as positive virtues. The timing and nature of the development of this municipality provides a highly developed example of the anxiety over urban influences which have been played out in all suburban areas. Through such activities as the restriction of industrial development and multi-unit housing to the transportation corridor, it will be show that the people of Ku-ring-gai recoiled from the Pacific Highway as an urban space in their midst.

However, it will also be argued that they recognised its significance as a place where civic life could be played out. The Highway was used in culturally charged ways. The tension between the need for urban outliers and the will to sustain a suburban space has characterised the relationship between the Highway and the Upper North Shore.

The Establishment of the Pacific Highway

The establishment of the road along the ridgeline between the watersheds of Sydney Harbour and the Hawkesbury River which became the Pacific Highway predates suburban development, which had been established by the Indigenous inhabitants of the area, the Guringai. The route was formed by Aboriginal preferences for travelling along ridgelines, the regular access to water, without trespassing on the country of neighbouring groups. This was appropriated by explorers and timber getters. The views, horizons, scale and gradients of Aboriginal tracks became those of the

Europeans following in their footsteps.[2] Timber getters began exploiting the large trees of the area early in the nineteenth century. Fiddens Wharf on the Lane Cove River was the site of a sawmill from as early as 1805 until the operation was moved to Pennant Hills by 1819 and later to Epping.[3] The activities of the timbergetters resulted in the establishment of several roads including Fiddens Wharf Road and Grosvenor Road which run between the Pacific Highway and the Lane Cove River from Killara and Lindfield respectively, as well as the main road along the ridgeline. An Australian road at this time could be a very rudimentary structure. William Charles Wentworth wrote in 1819 that to make a road was 'a very great ease'. The first step was to mark trees in the direction where the road was wanted. Others would follow this trail in preference to devising a new one for themselves. With use, the tracks of horses and carts would become visible and the grass disappear. According to Wentworth's understanding, a road was formed.[4]

Some timber getters made the North Shore their home. The first grant along the ridgeline road was made in 1819. Daniel Dering Matthew received 400 acres at Roseville and leased twice that amount for a sawmill. Richard Wall received a sixty acre grant in April 1821 while Robert Pymble was given his land in 1823.[5] Pymble established a timber mill as did his neighbour Thomas Hyndes. By the end of the 1820s, which also marked the end of land grants in the colony, twenty individuals had received blocks in the district ranging in size from 40 to 2000 acres.[6] The main road became dotted with that most essential amenity, a public house. By 1833, Daniel Bullock had opened a New Inn on Robert Pymble's land.[7] Later known as the Traveller's Rest, the pub was a centre for drinking, socialising and bare knuckle fighting. In direct contrast with its later characterisations, the Lane Cove River district was described in 1841 as the habitat of disreputable people who engaged in smuggling and sly grog transactions.[8] W.H. Wells' *Gazetteer* of 1848 gave the population of Gordon Parish between Roseville and Wahroonga as 443 people in 107 houses.[9]

Naming the ridgeline road proved difficult. This was not a road like Parramatta Road which marched off emphatically to a recognised destination, nor an official road like the Great Northern or Great Western Road named for political purposes. It was a little used road through a lightly populated area and scarcely warranted the status which an official name would give it. In the Deed of Grant of Clergy and School Lands at Gordon in February 1829, the road was called the Hunter's Hill Road.[10] In an 1858 source, it was Pennant Hills Road[11] and elsewhere, the Gordon Road. It was the Lane Cove Road which became the common usage and which the Pacific Highway directly superseded.

Once some of the land had been cleared through timber cutting, exotic fruit trees were planted, fed by the same plentiful rain and fertile soil which had permitted the native species to attain such large sizes. Crops including apricots, pears, nectarines, apples and oranges which were being produced for the Sydney market by the 1850s.[12] The population of this period consisted of a continuing representation of those in the timber industry, professionals, tradesmen and agriculturalists.[13]

General use of the road slowly increased, coexisting with the timber traffic. The 1852 report of the Select Committee on Internal Communication which heard evidence from local residents about the dangerous state of the road and its potential function as a feeder to the Great North Road and other routes north of Sydney. It was recommended that £500 be spent on clearing and stumping the road to Aaron Pearce's Corner to be recouped by placing a toll bar at St Leonards.[14] Despite this investment, in the 1860s, timbergetters complained that the state of the road was so poor, they could only carry half a load per trip.[15] A regular horse coach service was provided along the road by the 1870s.[16] The few amenities provided in the area were strung along the road. These included a post office in Gordon in 1860, a Roman Catholic chapel and school on Pymble Hill in 1863, St John's Church of England at Gordon in 1872 and Gordon Public School in 1876.[17] By 1880 the Upper North Shore was established as a rural district, with a permanent population mainly working in primary industry and with institutions for education and worship. Without easy communication with the city, efforts to interest people in purchasing two to twenty acre ' country lots' at Lindfield and Gordon failed.[18]

The Introduction of the Railway

The great change of the next decade and the development which transformed the rural area into a suburban one was the railway of the 1890s. The ridge top location of the road was echoed in the placement of the North Shore Rail Line, opened between Hornsby and St Leonards in 1890, and extended to the Harbour at Milson's Point in 1893.[19] The line was a triumph of influence and lobbying over demand. The first petition for such a line was presented in 1874. Funds were allocated in 1881 and a practicable route was plotted by 1882, but the survey was destroyed in the Garden Palace fire of that year.[20] Other less favoured areas fruitlessly petitioned and sent deputations requesting rail services. However the Member for St Leonards, Sir Henry Parkes, and several other members had land holdings near Hornsby. The North Shore Line was approved and completed in record time.[21] The potential to use the line to carry freight to the wharves of the North Shore enhanced support from the Public Works Committee.[22] Fortunately for these politicians, the population did rise, justifying not only the initial construction but also the addition of new stations. The beginning of

duplication of the line was made by the turn of the century and was completed in 1909. The line was electrified in 1928.

The coming railway line encouraged speculators to purchase and subdivide lands along its length. Having started with the development of contiguous Woollomooloo Hill in the 1820s, Sydney's suburbs had spread in all directions by the 1890s. This was fuelled by the desire to separate the home and the family from the sites of business and industry. Like their British and American cousins in the same years, Australians turned inward to make the well-being of the nuclear family their key goal. They decided that the best way to achieve this was to settle wives and children in separate dwellings on their own plot of land while men undertook often lengthy journeys to work.[23] Those of modest means occupied the inner ring of suburbs, but more distant areas like the Upper North Shore were particularly attractive to the upper middle class. Although it lacked the proximity to the ocean and cooling breezes enjoyed by most other prestige areas, the Upper North Shore was on higher ground than much of Sydney – 190 metres above sea level at Wahroonga Station. In keeping with the sanitarian goals of the suburbanite, this was a salubrious region. The great distance from the city made the area seem semi-rural rather than suburban and this impression was nurtured by the real estate developers who created large blocks and advertising slogans harkening back to English country estates. Distance also ensured that less wealthy people would not be able manage the expense of commuting.

The land that opened up by the rail line was subdivided and marketed by private developers. In the 1890s, small lots were released in proximity to the railway stations. Half acre blocks were offered along the Lane Cove Road and larger blocks of one to four acres were set back from the transportation corridor.[24] Sands Directories from the early twentieth century provide only limited coverage of occupations but indicate that urban professionals such as accountants, solicitors, surgeons, architects and barristers were coming to live amongst the existing population of tradesmen, fruitgrowers and orchardists. Senior civil servants were also well represented.[25] Large and gracious houses were built along the Lane Cove Road, including Norman Selfe's Pakenham built in 1894, now Hornsby and eventually demolished for a Westfield Plaza in 1960. Edgmond at Wahroonga was demolished for flats in the 1970s as was Kaludabah at Turramurra.[26] The nature of the population was established. As Peter Spearritt shows in *Sydney's Century*, the average cost of new homes built, home ownership, number of persons per room, percent unemployed during the Depression and juvenile delinquency, Ku-ring-gai quickly became one of the wealthiest and most advantaged Local Government Areas in Sydney.[27]

The Role of the Lane Cove Road

The increase in population led to demands for improvement of the Lane Cove Road for local access. In the absence of local government, the colonial government's Public Works Department bore responsibility for roads through the area. Much of the funding was allocated not by transportation needs, but according to the influence of the local member. Progress Associations and Roads Committees had been formed in many communities along the road by 1900.[28] Concerned with the provision of local public gardens and tree planting, they also raised money for roads and street lighting through voluntary subscriptions. These committees were the first organisations to begin to define and protect a conception of the district pioneered by land developers as a suburban retreat. Proposals deemed inconsistent with the desired character of the area were countered through individual and group activity. In the 1890s, for example, residents of Killara blocked a proposed general cemetery, blue shale mine and a butchering undertaking.[29]

While many residents believed that Progress committees and voluntary rating were sufficient, the State government was eager to increase local funding of local services and incorporated most of the state under the 1906 Local Government Act. The new Shire of Ku-ring-gai was largely of the same boundaries as the old Parish of Gordon, bounded on the north-west by Hornsby, on the south-east by Willoughby, to the north by the new Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and the south by the Lane Cove River Park. It was one of the largest local government areas in Sydney. Ku-ring-gai did not have a natural centre point, a conventional civic focus of activity or an identity like a square, cathedral or port The road running the length of the Shire provided one of its few points of commonality. The Council Chambers opened in Gordon in 1911, appropriately, right on the Lane Cove Road near St John's Church. The 1913 Royal Commission on a Greater Sydney considered including Ku-ring-gai in the super council area. Such was the shire's lack of interest that no representative was sent to give evidence to the Commission.[30] The population continued to rise, the six councillors were increased to nine. In 1928, Ku-ring-gai was made a municipality with twelve aldermen to share the burden of governance.[31] A modest new Georgian Revival style Council Chambers was built on the Lane Cove Road across from the public school at Gordon. From the road, its appearance was much like one of the grand homes in the surrounding suburbs.

The Lane Cove Road was not seen as a threat to the character of Ku-ring-gai. It was a local road carrying little traffic and after 1890, rail carried most passengers and freight. Far from turning from the road, the Council chose to locate its chambers there, and churches and schools were built on its verges as were many of the best homes.

However, with the coming of automobiles, the amenity of the road was quickly undermined. In the first years of the twentieth century, newly introduced motor cars were the play things of the wealthy and the mechanically minded. In a few decades, they became more common, especially in well to do areas such as the Upper North Shore. On roads designed for horse traffic, the narrower tires of cars caused damage and their unmuffled motors created noise and fumes. In dry weather, they were enveloped in shrouds of dust; in the wet, they threw up mud and damaged the road surface. Municipal Engineer Lionel J. Price wrote that the condition of the Lane Cove Road in the early 1920s had a bad reputation 'like the notorious Parramatta Road'.[32] Motorists' speed could not be accurately monitored and many accidents resulted.[33] Initially drawn from the most influential portion of the population, motorists organised and lobbied governments for sealed and widened roads more suited to their purposes.[34]

In the late 1920s, the Lane Cove Road was upgraded into the Pacific Highway in preparation for the increased motor traffic flows from the Sydney Harbour Bridge which was opened in 1932. The old road was too narrow for the contemporary standard of eighty-four feet which was deemed necessary to carry four lanes of road traffic, two tram lines and two footpaths.[35] The Lane Cove Road was sealed in 1927 with Ku-ring-gai Council conducting the project on behalf of the new Main Roads Board. The sealing of the road was the first step in an on going programme of upgrading and extension.[36] When the Board instigated the extension of the road north to the Queensland border, the Lane Cove Road became a through route leading to the new highway from Hornsby to the Hawkesbury River and on to Gosford, Newcastle.[37] The patchwork of new and upgraded roads was christened the Pacific Highway in 1931.[38] The changes made to cater to the car and with the increase in traffic, the suburban stretch of the Pacific Highway became a contested space. While it retained its collection of significant buildings and its key role in local communications, it also became a symbol of the unwanted imposition of urban realities on Ku-ring-gai.

The Impact of the Highway on the North Shore

The impact of the Highway became a central concern of the residents of the North Shore. The pioneers of the Federation period were menaced by resumption for realignment along the Highway, literally losing ground from their extensive gardens to its expansion and increasing their exposure to noise and fumes. At Hillview in Turramurra, the front stone wall had to be carefully taken down in 1936 and re-erected many feet closer to the house.[39] The Church of England girls' school Abbotsleigh, at Wahroonga, lost eighteen feet of land and had to pay the costs of moving their fence when the highway came through in 1929.[40] While the schools held to their sites, many families vacated their homes, leaving the highway for other uses.

The means for managing the impact of the Highway became more sophisticated than those employed by earlier residents' groups. To protect residential areas from both the Highway and commercial development, Ku-ring-gai Council permitted businesses to be conducted only in specified areas. Most of these were along the Highway, near the railway stations. They did this through Section 309 of the Local Government Act of 1919 which allowed the declaration of Residential Districts.[41] From 1921 Ku-ring-gai Council declared areas as small as a single block to be Residential Districts within which no buildings could be used for the purposes of any' trade, industry, manufacture, shop or place of amusement'. The exceptions were those mentioned in schedules related to that site.[42] In the Residential Districts along the Lane Cove Road and streets leading into it, Schedules included greengrocers, tobacconists, hairdressers, banks, chemists and refreshment rooms. The only two hotels permitted in the municipality were also on the Highway. The residue of the Shire outside of these specific Districts was declared to be another Residential District, within which no industry at all could be undertaken.

The limitation of non-residential development largely to the transportation corridor preserved other areas purely for housing. As traffic increased this protected the homes from the highway. By 1930, there were 81 Residential Districts in Ku-ring-gai.[43] The commitment to the exclusion of industry may be seen in the Council's involvement in two High Court cases on the matter. In 1928, the Council's prosecution of a boot repairer for operating in a Residential District was overturned, leading to an alteration in the legislation to clarify the operation of Residential Districts. Both the barrister for the appellant and one of the judges argued that it was acceptable to use the legislation to exclude noxious trades but that those which were harmless, noiseless and remote from the public should not be excluded.[44] This was not the opinion of the Council, nor of many citizens. In 1963, the Council won in the High Court, forcing the closure of a reception centre.[45] The largely middle class, public servant and professional population had little concern for local employment. The train, the bridge and private cars permitted breadwinners to travel rapidly into the City, the site of work, and equally efficiently to retreat to the suburban haven in the evening. The tolerated local services enabled the women and their servants to conduct daily housekeeping while larger or specialty items could be sent from the city.

The use of Residential District proclamations for suburbs where the highway veered away from the railway station resulted in an almost complete absence of commercial development. A 1918 real estate guide reported 'Warrawee having no shops at all, and Wahronoga [sic] only one very small shop.'[46] In time a local shopping centre did develop at centre did develop at Wahroonga. In Warrawee, the Council was assisted by a local resident with interests in insurance and real estate named Beresford Grant. He prevented the establishment of shops by buying up sites adjacent to the station and having houses built on them.[47] Killara similarly excluded almost all commercial development. As Whitham noted in his 1927 *Book of the North Shore*, there were not only no big shops in Ku-ring-gai, but also no public buildings to admire and no libraries. There was little of a public nature and little to attract people from other parts of the city. Referring specifically to Wahroonga, he noted that even the streets were winding and uneven providing a sense of enclosure and offering no outward view to the wider city.[48] Pure suburbia was the goal of the community leaders.

Despite these efforts, industry, broadly defined, did creep into Ku-ring-gai. As Helen Proudfoot has argued, the building industry thrived in Ku-ring-gai. Residential building continued almost without pause, filling up the initial subdivisions, pressing into the steeper and more remote areas. Large blocks were often made into more than one by battle axing. Controversially, in the past decade, single family dwellings were replaced with medium density in specific zones. Supporting this were the activities of the Council itself, with its works depot in Gordon and its quarry, garbage incinerator and nightsoil depot in West Pymble.[49] Similarly, education and health care as private enterprises were well established and tolerated.[50] The other industry which was ignored was the motoring industry. Cars were purchased, serviced, driven for payment, parked and displayed throughout the municipality. This motoring industry not only helped people travel to work, but provided work for many in the district. The sequestering of commerce and industry along the highway emphasised its urban character and its difference from the rest of the municipality.

Industry was not the only urban feature heavily discouraged by Ku-ring-gai Council and residents and pushed onto its Pacific Highway margin. Although accepted in many other prestige areas, including Mosman and Woollahra, alternative forms of shelter were seen as a potential threat to the character of Ku-ring-gai.[51] Flats did not sit well with the single storey suburban ideal. They were deemed unsuitable for children, poorly lit and ventilated and thought to predispose people to tuberculosis.[52] They were associated with everything from lowering moral standards by freeing women from domestic chores to overstraining the waste disposal system and depreciating land values. In discussions of flats in Ku-ring-gai in 1929, Alderman McFadyen made clear the identification of flats with feared urban evils when he declared that flats were undesirable as they would attract the 'flotsam and jetsam of Darlinghurst'.[53] Blocks of flats were initially only permitted in the liminal zone between urban and suburban space. In 1933 this constituted just 4.7% of the dwellings in Ku-ring-gai.[54] The first purpose built block, Dormie House, was erected in Killara in 1938, on the Pacific Highway.[55] In 1940, the Local Government Act was amended to permit and control the construction of flat buildings. After further changes in 1945, Ku-ring-gai Council agreed that flats could be built, but that they would have to be 'Class A' structures and should be built along the railway and the highway.

By the early post war period, highway frontages had been transformed from an accepted, even desired position, to a sort of purgatory for the most marginal residents of the municipality. The brunt of the noise and air pollution generated by highway drivers would be borne by those who were literally and figuratively on the edges of the North Shore community rather than the solid families on their quarter acre blocks. In the worst cases, flat buildings were located on narrow strips of land between the highway and the railway. Instead of enjoying the suburban garden lifestyle, residents were virtual prisoners in their buildings. Proximity to the railway line was still valued, but new areas were developed well away from it and the Highway. These areas were Roseville Chase, West Lindfield and South Turramurra.

As well as sheltering behind shops and blocks of flats, many Ku-ring-gai residents retreated from the Highway even as drivers. The train provided an alternative for city commuters and school children, leading to what Whitham described as a clannish disposition based on taking the ' same way home'.[56] As early as 1920, there was some sense that the people of Ku-ring-gai might have to retreat from their own main road. In May of that year, C. Bowes Thistlethwaite gave an address entitled 'Greater Gordon' in which he recommended the provision of alternate routes through Ku-ring-gai running parallel to the Pacific Highway through the Lane Cove River and Middle Harbour valleys.[57] This idea came to fruition in Lady Game Drive, built by relief workers during the 1920s and 30s; the Eastern Valley Way in 1939; the Eastern Arterial Highway in the 1950s and the Comenarra Parkway, made a through road in 1974.[58] The expressway advocated in the 1951 Cumberland County Plan to run from Ryde to Hornsby thereby relieving the Pacific Highway was not constructed although the M4 may achieve the same end when it is connected with the F3.[59] Even in the absence of good through routes, many local drivers prefered lesser known back roads to the Highway. Writing about the streets of Melbourne, Andrew Brown-May said:

> *'By the 1920s, the motor car had radically and incontestably changed the physical landscape and geometry of the street, had altered its aesthetic experience as smoke, noise and speed began to replace*

the sound, pace and odour of the horse-drawn age, and had created a whole new conception of time and space'.[60]

This was undoubtedly evident to observers of the old Lane Cove Road. Helen Proudfoot identified the upgrading of Lane Cove Road to Pacific Highway status as an act which ' destroyed forever the quiet and leisurely character of the early 'North Shore'.[61] While it still had an impact, the process was incremental and the measures put in place by citizens and councils protected the areas away from the highway. Elizabeth Evatt recalled a childhood of wheat fields, snakes and blackberries when she grew up in Wahroonga in the 1940s. She wrote, ' Although we lived in a city, we felt close to the real Australia, which we knew was the outback or the bush'.[62] *The Advancement of Spencer Button*, published in 1950, used Ku-ring-gai as the epitome of wealth and good taste. Spencer Button and his wife could hardly contain their envy when they visited a powerful senior colleague at his 'little palace' on over an acre of ground at Warrawee, set in real bushland and reached by a long gravel drive.[63] To a large extent, the efforts of the Council and residents were successful and a distinctively suburban enclave had been established behind the shops and blocks of flats along the Highway.

Conclusion

The Pacific Highway is just one of the many outliers of urbanity which reaches into Ku-ring-gai. Utilities such as water, sewerage, gas and electricity also link the suburbs with the centre. Removed from line of sight and everyday experience, these services are only obvious when they fail.[64] While these other urban forces extend into the suburbs, none has the presence and on going cultural power of the highway. Despite all of the efforts to turn away from the Highway, it remains central to the identity and functioning of the district.

As reference to almost any real estate advertising copy will demonstrate, social space is delineated by the Highway's separation of the 'blue ribbon' east side from the slightly tainted west. As well as reflecting the contrasting topography of the more level east and the sharply descending west, and the differing types of subdivision which took place on alternate sides of the Highway, this division echoes the larger divide of east coast cities into the desirable East and the suspect West.[65] This is emphasised by the general use of the terms east and west when, with the transportation corridor running toward the north west, the terms north and south could be used instead. As Spearritt notes, man made features frequently create physical barriers and subcommunities in suburbs which may otherwise be considered uniform.[66]

In an area lacking a conventional central place, the highway serves as the ceremonial space where many memorials are located and great events marked. One third of the sites of Bicentennial memorials and plaques in Ku-ring-gai are on the Pacific Highway.[67] These mark significant buildings located on the Highway such as St. John's Church in Gordon and the Greengate Hotel and historical figures not related with any other single site in the municipality such as Governor Arthur Phillip and the Guringai people. The highway itself is celebrated in a plaque on the Roseville Cinema. War memorials have tended to be associated more with railway stations than with the highway, but several are now located on the Highway, including those at Roseville, the Council Chambers and in several schools. In contrast, gatherings marking war have focused on the Highway, including Empire Day Processions, Armistice Day celebrations in 1918 and, until recently, ANZAC Day marches.[68] The Coronation of King George VI in 1937 was marked with ceremonies on the Highway between the Gordon Public School and the Council Chambers and including the planting of trees along the Highway as a long lasting memorial.[69] The location of permanent memorials and the conducting of commemorations along the Highway both demonstrates and reinforces its social significance.

The Pacific Highway is the public face of the North Shore and shapes the opinions of other urban residents towards it. As driving on the Highway became the primary point of view for observers of Ku-ring-gai, the area became pleasant scenery pictorialised by viewing through the windscreen. The exotic and showy gardens for which the area was known have been described as a creative and self-affirming outlet for women not yet liberated by cars and paid work.[70] Those who had won that liberation, or who accessorised the automobile of a cooperative male, gazed at the roses and camellias as they rumbled past. As traffic volumes and expectations of road quality have increased so has impatience with the Pacific Highway. In the same way as the municipality seems to represent an older, more conservative tradition of Australian suburbia, the Highway is a quaint but less than charming reminder of past standards in road building. Crowded, narrow lanes and frequent traffic lights bordered by roadside trees, the remaining grand houses, growing numbers of flats and commercial centres along the Highway are Ku-ring-gai to those who, by direct public policy, have been given no reason to stop there.

In the postwar period of planning and social engineering, concern was expressed at the lack of a distinct business and cultural centre for the municipality and the apparent absence of connection between the constituent suburbs.[71] In seeking a public square or administrative centre, their vision was blinded by convention. The urban

outlier, the Pacific Highway is the civic centre of the municipality, a place which they visit regularly, which serves a utilitarian purpose, which unites residents both as an issue and as a transportation corridor. This represents Ku-ring-gai to the world outside and holds ceremonial, ritual significance. The Pacific Highway demonstrates what Scott Donaldson argued with regard to American suburbs, that they are still organically part of urban culture and that far from losing contact with the 'lively core of the city' as one Australia critic believed, suburbs are sustained physically and culturally by the flow of urban influences outward from the centre.[72]

The tension between the need for and the drawing away from the highway continues as rising traffic volume has made it a more anomalous part of the municipality. Under current state government policy, Ku-ring-gai is being forced to draw up a plan for managing increasing urban density. This has been strongly resisted by many residents who insist that part of the distinctive character of the municipality is its large allotment size and predominance of single family dwellings. As a member of the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society wrote, ' pressure to find land for medium and high density development to contain the suburban sprawl, are endangering the life style of the area.' One aim of their recent history, *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, is to help ' inhabitants understand what it is they are preserving and why'.[73] Responsesto government pressure have included anger, intransigence. This has amplified the established strategy of increasing densities in the transportation corridor. The Residential Management Strategy developed by the Council was rejected by the Minister of Urban Affairs and Planning partly because the Council proposed to continue its previous policy of encouraging increased densities principally along the Highway. Recently, the Minister took control of six development sites in the municipality to ensure that medium density projects proceeded on them.

The Pacific Highway's role in Sydney's Upper North Shore suburbs is a reminder that although the suburbs are distinctive places, they remain integral elements of a larger city. Suburban rhetoric emphasises difference and distance. The city reaches out, threatening the suburban peace, but still allows residents to enjoy aspects of urban life without leaving their home districts. These tentacles of the city are essential to suburban enclaves, but, in Ku-ring-gai, these have been carefully managed through avoidance, buffer zones and strict controls. The Pacific Highway linking the city and suburbs, and providing a ceremonial centre for an amorphous region, is an urban space extending lineally through suburbia.

References

1 Ku-ring-gai encompasses the area from Roseville, ten kilometres north of Sydney Harbour, to Wahroonga.

2 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay, An Essay in Spatial History*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, 339.

3 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai, The Story of Ku-ring-gai's Growth and Development*, Gordon: Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, 1996, 15 – 16.

4 William Charles Wentworth, *Statistical, Historical and Political Description of the Colony of NSW and its Dependent Settlements in VDL*, London: G. and W.B. Whittaker, 1819, 129.

5 Wendy Paton, *Pymble Avenue, Pymble*, Ku-ring-gai, 1989, 8.

6 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 38.

7 Wendy Paton, *Pymble Avenue, Pymble*, Ku-ring-gai, 1989, 10.

8 *Sydney Gazette*, 25 February 1841.

9 William Henry Wells, *Geographical Dictionary or Gazetteer of the Australian Colonies*, Sydney: W. and F. Ford, 1848, 186.

10 W. Creswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, Sydney: Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council, 1963, 8.

11 *Ibid*., 8. O'Reilly cites references in the Deed of Grant of Clergy and School Lands at Gordon, 1829 and Plan showing present Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, 1858.

12 Wendy Paton, *Pymble Avenue, Pymble*, Ku-ring-gai, 1989, 9.

13 Robert Staas, *Housing in Ku-ring-gai*, Sydney: Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, 1986, 2.

14 Hugh Hamilton Newell, ' Road Engineering and its Development in Australia, 1788 - 1938', Part 1, *Transactions of the Institution*, XIX (February 1938), 42; Eric Russell, *Lane Cove 1788, 1895, 1970, A North Shore History*, Sydney: Municipality of Lane Cove, 1970, 85 – 86.

15 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 44.

16 W. Cresswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, 6.

17 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 44.

18 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 45.

19 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai, The Story of Ku-ring-gai's Growth and Development*, Sydney: Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, 1996, 13.

20 W. Cresswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, 6 - 7.

21 O'Reilly argues that it was Parkes' need to win votes in St Leonards in the 1882 election that make him back the rail line as well as a harbour bridge. (W. Cresswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, Ku-ring-gai, 9.) For an examination of the role of politicians' vested interests in the construction of an earlier rail line, see Lesley Muir, 'Public Spending and Private Property: The Illawarra Line Cabal', in Max Kelly, ed., *Sydney, City of Suburbs*, Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1987, 30 – 52.

22 Alan Roberts, 'Planning Sydney's Transport, 1875 – 1900' , Max Kelly, ed., *Nineteenth Century Sydney*, Sydney: Sydney University Press and Sydney History Group, 1978, 27.

23 Graeme Davison, 'Australia, the First Suburban Nation' , *Journal of Urban History* 22, 1 (November 1995), 44.
24 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 69.
25 *Sands Sydney, suburban and country commercial directory ... : comprising amongst other information, street, suburban, country commercial ... and miscellaneous lists*. Sydney: J. Sands, 1901-1933 for Turramurra and Wahroonga.
26 Helen Barker and May Elven, *Houses of Hornsby Shire*, Vol. I, *the Large Houses, 1886 - 1926*, Hornsby, 1989, 26; *Demolished Houses of Sydney*, Joy Hughes, ed., Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1999, 129; described by W.E.M. Abbott in *A Very Ordinary Life, Reminiscences of Childhood, 1906 - 25*, Sydney: G. Abbott, 1993, 34.
27 Peter Spearritt, *Sydney's Cent*ury, A History, Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2000, 59, 66. See also P. Spearritt, ' Sydney at the census 1911 – 1976' in *Twentieth Century Sydney, Studies in urban and social history*, Jill Roe, ed., Sydney: The Sydney History Group, 1980.
28 W. Cresswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, 13.
29 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 49.
30 F.A. Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales, 1906 to the Present*. Sydney: Sydney University Press and the Local Government Association of NSW, 1978, 185.
31 *NSW Government Gazette*, 147, 26 October 1928, 4635.
32 Lionel J. Price, 'The Development of Lane Cove Road (Pacific Highway) in the Municipality of Ku-ring-gai', *Main Roads*, Vol. II, No. 11 (July 1931), 173.
33 Rosemary Broomham, Vital Connections, A History of New South Wales Roads from 1788. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 2001, 124.
34 For an account of road lobbying and its success, see Rosemary Broomham, *On the Road, The NRMA's First Seventy-five Years*, Sydney, 1996.
35 Main Roads Board of New South Wales, *First Annual Report*, 14.
36 *Road Builder in New South Wales*, 15 May 1929, 33.
37 Rosemary Broomham, *Vital Connections, A History of New South Wales Roads from 1788*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 2001, 116.
38 See Nancy Cushing, 'The Pacific Highway and Australian Modernity', Xavier Pons, ed., *Departures*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, forthcoming.
39 *History of Hillview, 1832 – 1983*, Sydney: n.p., 1983. This source gives the date of the reconstruction as 1931; photographs held by the State Library of NSW indicate that the land was resumed in 1936. See, for example, GPO125267.
40 P. Marr, 'A History of School House, Abbotsleigh, Pacific Highway, Wahroonga' , *The Historian, Journal of Ku-ring-gai Historical Society*, 12, 2 (June 1983), 12.
41 This has been discussed more fully by Helen Proudfoot in ' Milestones in Planning History, Residential Proclamations in Ku ring gai', *Australian Planner*, March 1992, 25 – 28.
42 NSW Government Gazette, no. 91, 3 July 1925, 2845.
43 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai' , Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 79.
44 Dyer v Luckett (1928) 41 Commonwealth Law Reports 44, 45 and 49.
45 Cooney v Council of the Municipality of Ku-ring-gai (1963) 114 Commonwealth Law Reports, 582.
46 M.A. Harris, *Where to live, ABC Guide to Sydney and Suburbs*, c1918, quoted by Ian A. Ramage, *Wahroonga, Our Home*. Sydney: Ian Ramage, 1991, 129.
47 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 103.
48 Charles Whitham, 'The Book of the North Shore or the Hundred of Packenham' , unpublished typescript, Sydney, 1927, ML MSS4149, 7, 35.
49 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 73.
50 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 36.
51 Richard Cardew, 'Flats in Sydney: the thirty percent solution?' in *Twentieth Century Sydney, Studies in urban and social history*, Jill Roe, ed., Sydney: The Sydney History Group, 1980.
52 Frank Stapley, 'Housing' , Second Australian Town Planning Conference, *Volume of Proceedings of the Second Australian Town Planning Conference and Exhibition,* Brisbane, 1918, 133.
53 'Flats and Morals' , *The Advocate*, 7 June 1929 quoted by Proudfoot in ' Milestones in Planning' , 27.
54 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 89.
55 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 53. The journal *Building* included a feature on the block in its 24 August 1940 number.
56 Charles Whitham, 'The Book of the North Shore or the Hundred of Packenham', unpublished typescript, Sydney, 1927, ML MSS4149, 129.
57 W. Cresswell O'Reilly, *Ku-ring-gai, Early History and Development*, Ku-ring-gai, 1950, 18.
58 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 42, 32, 54; *South Turramurra, a special place*, Sydney: Kissing Point Progress Association, 1998, 45.
59 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 93.
60 Andrew Brown-May, *The Highway of Civilisation and Common Sense: Street Regulation and the Transformation of Social Space in 19th and Early 20th Century Melbourne*, Urban Research Program Working Paper No. 49, Canberra, 1995, 2.
61 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 47.
62 Elizabeth Evatt, personal recollections in *Australians, a historical library*, v. 5, *Australians from 1939*, Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987, 406.
63 Brian James, *The Advancement of Spencer Button*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1950, 173.

64 Another urban incursion which has risen in the consciousness of residents of Ku-ring-gai in the 1990s is aircraft noise. A locater beacon located at West Pymble guides descending aircraft over the area. As an affluent district with one third of its residents born overseas, the Upper North Shore is a significant contributor to Sydney's air traffic but many are reluctant to accept the 'menace' of aircraft noise. (*Focus on Ku-ring-gai*, 22).

65 Diane Powell*, Out west: perceptions of Sydney's western suburbs*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993.

66 Spearritt, *Sydney's Century*, 241.

67 This information is taken from a report on memorials in Ku-ring-gai compiled by M.R. Wyatt in January 1985 and held by Ku-ring-gai Library and from Thurles Thomas, *Ku-ring-gai Bicentenary Memorials and Plaques, Tour of Sites*, Sydney: Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, 1989.

68 *North Shore Times*, 15 September 1999 and 18 August 1999 discuss the march having occurred since 1950 but not being permitted that year because of the obstruction of traffic.

69 Technical drawing of the plan for the planting of trees, Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library, 994.91GORD 1937.

70 H. Proudfoot, 'Thematic History of Ku-ring-gai', Robert Moore, Penelope Pike, Helen Proudfoot and Lester Tropman and Associates, *Municipality of Ku-ring-gai Heritage Study*, Roseville, 1987, 36.

71 Report by Ralph Jackson cited by H. Proudfoot in 'Milestones in Planning History', 27.

72 Scott Donaldson, *Suburban Myth*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, 54 Chris Wallace-Crabbe quoted by Graeme Davison *et. al.*, 'The View from the Ming Wing' , G.Davison, T. Dingle and S. O'Hanlon, eds, *Cream Brick Frontier, Histories of Australian Suburbia*, Melbourne: Monash Publications in History, No. 19, 199, 3.

73 *Focus on Ku-ring-gai, the story of Ku-ring-gai's growth and development*, Gordon, Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, 1996. 14

Dr Nancy Cushing is a lecturer in History at the University of Newcastle's Central Coast Campus. As a cultural historian, she has published on topics including the beach, holiday making and perceptions of Newcastle. Her current project takes a broad view of the history of the Pacific Highway as a modernist project and an ongoing site for the expression of Australian culture.

Plotting Eden: Community Gardens in the 21st Century

An analysis of community gardening in three Pacific Rim cities

Richard Griffiths

Abstract

Since the 1970s community gardening has developed from an isolated activity to an international urban and suburban movement. Often informal and highly localised, community gardens provide a social space and a form of vernacular design that is often very receptive to the expression of minority cultures, and to the diverse aspirations of city-dwellers. Intimate green spaces on otherwise anonymous suburban blocks, they also offer a unique mix of the public and the private. More communal than private gardens, more personal and malleable than public parks, community gardens, in their small way, are changing the texture of suburban life. In the words of one project this paper studies, they are 'bringing nature to neighbourhoods'.

This paper presents a comparison of community gardening in three pacific rim cities: Seattle, Vancouver and Sydney. It highlights the relative successes of a number of community gardening initiatives and demonstrates that where partnerships are actively fostered between grassroots organisation and statutory agencies, the quality of urban and suburban life can be greatly enhanced. It assesses the extent to which community gardening can meet a wide range of social aims, not 'merely' the recreational.

The paper also examines how contemporary community gardens fit with the traditional quest for 'garden suburbs', and with the wider dream of an urban pastoral - with all its tensions and challenges. The presentation of this paper will include the showing of a number of illustrative photographic slides.

Gardens are an integral part of human habitation, for food, recreation, and for sheer beauty. They exist in many different forms. This paper analyses the development of community gardens in three harbour cities of the Pacific Rim: Seattle, Vancouver and Sydney. It shows how some of the positive lessons learned from the Seattle experience may be of some relevance to the other two cities, and perhaps more widely also. It should be noted from the outset that the focal point of a community garden is *community*:

> '*Flowers grow in flower gardens. Vegetables grow in vegetable gardens And people grow in community gardens*'.[1]

The definition of community garden is changing and evolving. This is in part because the movement only began as recently as the early 1970s and has still to attain its potential or maturity. It is also because community gardens mean different things to different people and organisations. This fluidity may be illustrated by the change in the Vancouver Parks and Recreation Board definition in its community gardens policy.

The Parks and Recreation Board approved a community gardens policy in 1995. In 1996 it defined a community garden as:

> '*A piece of land used by individuals to produce food and flowers for the personal use of society members. A community garden also has common areas that can be used by both members and non-members, and education programs that involve schools and community groups in gardening activities*.'

In 2002, however, this had changed:

> '*For the purposes of this policy, a community garden is defined as a community environmental education program operated by a non-profit society. The program has the following features: A piece of land is utilized by the society to produce food and flowers for the personal use of society members. A community education program is in place which encourages the involvement of schools, youth groups and citizens who do not have an assigned plot in gardening activities*.'[2]

This move away from viewing community gardens as parcels of land, emphasizing instead their dynamic

educational and environmental aims, is instructive. The benefits of community gardening are many, and community gardens may be able to meet a number of different social, educational, environmental and even economic objectives.

Benefits of Community Gardening

According to Russ Grayson of the Australian Community Gardens Network, community gardening brings benefits to individuals, neighbourhoods, communities and the cities they are part of. Individual benefits include health in the form of nutrition (if food is being grown) and in the form of physical fitness. Individuals benefit from the inevitable learning that is involved in community gardening, through mental stimulation and increases in knowledge and expertise. Community gardens are often used as learning venues, particularly for training in organic gardening, but also in waste reduction, sustainable building and design, permaculture and other related disciplines. There are also social benefits to be derived from community gardening, which is a social activity where people meet others and build a sense of community.

Community gardens improve the urban environment by helping to diversify the use and visual impact of open space, and offering new forms of recreation. They also improve the natural environment by providing wildlife habitat and vegetational diversity. Finally, community gardens can help improve the organisational practice and performance of government agencies, especially as it seeks partnership with citizens. Community gardens can be used by government (primarily local government) to demonstrate the enactment of policy, for instance, waste management or community development.

Community Gardening in Seattle, USA

In Seattle the two main groups promoting community gardening are *Seattle Tilth*, a voluntary group of organic 'urban farmers', and *P-Patch*, a programme that started as one woman's vision but is now integrated with the city council Department of Neighborhoods.

The Department of Neighborhoods' P-Patch Program, in conjunction with the not-for-profit Friends of P-Patch, provides community garden space for residents of 44 Seattle neighborhoods. Seattle's first community garden started in 1973. 50 community gardens now exist in a variety of urban & suburban locations. Waiting lists are typically 600-800 families long, & 2-3 years in central locations. Over 1900 plots serve more than 4,600 urban gardeners on 12 acres of land. Special programs serve low-income, disabled, youth and non-English speaking populations.

Some of the Seattle community gardens have been established 'from the ground up' by committed locals. This is true of the Seattle Tilth demonstration garden. However, the majority of gardens have been developed with strong support from the P-Patch program, which operates in a 'top down' manner, being fairly proactive in starting new gardens.

Friends of P-Patch in partnership with Seattle Housing Authority has recently set up a Community Supported Agriculture enterprise (CSA) in three neighbourhoods of Seattle (Rainier Vista Sunrise Garden, New Holly Most Abundant Garden and High Point Market Garden). Recently arrived immigrants from South East Asia, mainly with prior horticultural skills provide fresh produce for sale by subscription. The project has ten community gardens in total, with plots for 120 families.

Some of the gardens are very small, no bigger than an average suburban plot. Others are much larger. Interlake is the largest community garden in Seattle, with 132 plots. It shares the site of an old refuse tip with a golf course. Its focal point is a community shed with patio, pergolas, barbecue and picnic seating. The use of shared facilities such as gardening tools encourages a sense of community.

A 1996 survey of gardeners showed that 25% of P-Patch gardeners lived below the federal poverty level, and 11% relied on food bank assistance. Community gardening allows participants to raise their own food to improve nutrition and benefit health. For many P-Patch participants of limited means a garden plot helps create food security rather than dependence on food subsidies. Seattle's community gardeners also promote food security by donating eight tons of fresh produce a year to Seattle area food banks.

The gardens are managed to be ecologically benign, and all P-Patch gardens are organic. P-Patch's motto is 'Bringing nature to Neighborhoods'. Cascade community garden is in the grounds of a community centre and has unique landscaped water storage tanks to utilise runoff from the centre's roof. Community gardens contribute to the 'look' of their neighbourhoods. They allow for vernacular design, and for artistic expression. A sense of informality and humour tends to prevail - in contrast to much of city design.

They are spaces in the city that can be enjoyed by many, and even loved. On a recent visit to Cascade community garden, I saw that the following note had been pinned to the noticeboard:

'And I say
I shall beautify
Through tenderness

As I shall plant
With my hands,
Water with my tears,
Warm with my heart
And care for you
For you are a very part
Of my soul'

Seattle doesn't have the largest network of community gardens in the USA. New York has around 750 and Philadelphia has over 1000. Seattle's 50 gardens are therefore a modest but thriving community resource that other cities might envy. What factors account for their success?
Some probable factors are:

- Strong city council support: P-Patch has 4.5 full-time-equivalent staff
- The city of Seattle approved a resolution in 1992 that community gardens be part of the comprehensive plan of the city, particularly in medium and high density areas.
- Vocal advocacy from voluntary groups such as Friends of P-Patch and Seattle Tilth
- A surrounding (sub-)culture of organic food and gardening, including educational programmes and commercial ventures such as CSA and farmers markets

Community Gardening in Vancouver, Canada

Greater Vancouver has 21 community gardens, 12 of which are in the City itself. The first garden began at Strathcona Park in 1985. The Parks and Recreation Board is supportive, leasing land and evolving its own community gardens policy, already mentioned. Vancouver is home to a high profile voluntary agency promoting urban agriculture and community gardening: *City Farmer, 'Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture'*. This provides information and networking internationally through the World Wide Web. It also provides training and advice from its small demonstration garden in the suburb of Kitsilano.

Why, then, does Vancouver have significantly fewer community gardens than Seattle? A number of reasons present themselves:

- They began a decade later than in Seattle (Strathcona Park, 1985) and therefore have ten or twelve years of catching up to do.
- Council recognition remains mainly limited to the Parks Board (i.e., they are seen as 'recreational facilities' by other branches of local government)
- There is a lack of dedicated staff. Vancouver community gardeners look enviously at the staff of P-Patch in Seattle, and at gardeners in a Canadian city such as Montreal, which has three paid '*animateurs*' to promote community gardening there.
- Until recently, sites approved for community gardens were limited to Parks-controlled land, and it has not been easy to find up-to-date information about other council-owned land as there is no inventory.
- Perhaps most importantly, Community Gardens are not featured on the comprehensive city plan
- One further minor factor is that at present it is not permitted to sell the produce from community gardens in Vancouver at farmers' markets or through food box schemes.

Community Gardening in Sydney, Australia

Sydney currently has 23 community gardens in operation. One of the more successful attempts at co-ordination between gardens has been South Sydney Council's community gardens programme. This covers 7 gardens, including Cook Community Garden, on the Waterloo estate. The emphasis on the programme, and the source of a significant part of its funding, has been waste reduction

At the Claymore estate near Campbelltown, a satellite of Sydney, redevelopment of large public open spaces has turned them from a liability to a community asset. Based on the American Radburn model, the estate design allowed hidden corners for vandalism and drug activity. Now the estate has largely been 'de-Radburnised' and a significant part of this transformation is the Tongan-style community garden. Alternatively it might be said that community gardening has been used as an effective management tool to allow the public space to be used for its original purpose.

The geographic focus of community gardening in Sydney was at first the inner-city and it then moved to the eastern suburbs. The main point of growth for community gardening, however, is the metropolitan area's demographic centre, the west.

Fairfield was the location of probably the first community garden in the area, where a group of Asian immigrants started to grow vegetables. St Clair Community Garden followed in the early 1990s. Both of these gardens are now defunct. Young Earth Community Garden was established in the middle of the nineties and continues. Now, the pace of community garden development in Western Sydney is increasing with Bidwill and Riverwood gardens and the Holy Family community garden at Emerton.

Pushing the community garden agenda in the region is a new organisation consisting mainly of community workers from the western and south-western regions. The *Gardens for Western Sydney* project liases with local government and the Department of Housing, promoting the gardens as venues for community-building.

Ways Forward

What can Sydney learn from the experience of Seattle and Vancouver? Contrasting these latter two cities' approaches to community gardening has shown that differing approaches can either help or hinder the development of community gardens. The attitude of local government is highly significant.
Some factors that may assist in the spread of community gardens through Sydney are as follows:

- Think 'multiple use'. Each community garden can be a venue for a wide variety of activities, each reinforcing the others
- don't overlook the small – small-scale is manageable and appropriate for community gardens. Growth comes through multiplication.
- employ community garden co-ordinators/liaison officers
- develop a set of guidelines for statutory agencies on setting up and maintaining community gardens
- allow for community gardens in land use planning instruments, so that a special case does not have to be argued each time a community garden is proposed
- include community gardens in municipal development plans
- design community gardens into new developments as well as 'retro-fitting' existing suburbs

Conclusion

There is considerable scope for community gardens to flourish in the early years of the 21st century, as long as, in each city, the conditions for their growth are made as favourable as possible. Until now, most community gardens have been added on to their neighbourhood as an afterthought (however worthwhile). In future, it is possible that we shall see not just the adaptive reuse of existing suburban space, but the integration of community gardens into the planning process from the outset. This will require advocacy of community gardens as a viable and desirable urban land use. There is no reason in principle why Vancouver and Sydney should not have the kind of modest but real success with community gardening that Seattle and other cities around the world have enjoyed.

References

1 Seattle Dept of Neighborhoods & Friends of P-Patch, *P-Patch Program Draft Five-Year Plan*, 2002

2 Vancouver Parks and Gardens Board, 2001 Community Gardens Policy <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/parks&gardens/comgardn.htm> [accessed 23.2.2002]

Bibliography

Crabtree, L. A. (1999) Sustainability as seen from a vegetable garden. Unpublished Honours thesis, Department of Human Geography, Macquarie University.
http://www.thirdangel.com/sustainability/

Campbell, A. (1998) Community Gardens and Community Waste: the Development, management and operation of community food gardens in the South Sydney City Council Area. NSW Institute for Local Self Reliance, Newtown.

Eliott, C. (1983) Growing in the City: Employment, Education and Recreation in Australian City Farms and Community Gardens. Social Impacts Publications, Milsons Point, NSW.

Grayson, R. (1999) 'Community gardens.' Greenhouse Living, May 1999, 60-62.

Horin, A. (1999) 'Garden grows the spirit of Waterloo.' Sydney Morning Herald, 21/10/1999, p5.

Worner, D. (1999) Cook Community Garden: Just Fresh Vegies? A Case Study in Community Development. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Department of Social Work, University of New South Wales.

Wright, S. (1992) 'Smelling the Earth': Towards a Model of Contemporary Social Change. Unpublished Honours thesis, University of Sydney.

Resources

P-Patch
http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/don/ppatch/

City Farmer
http://www.cityfarmer.org

Australian Community Gardens Network
http://www.magna.com.au/~pacedge/garden/

Dr Richard Griffiths, MSc, MA, PhD, studied Resource Management at Edinburgh University, where he won the Institute of Ecology and Resource Management Prize for his dissertation on urban agriculture. He has taught Environmental Ethics at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University.

On the Council: A Study of the Changing Reality of Being a Local Authority Tenant in Britain

Sheila Owen & John Hughes

Abstract

In the United Kingdom, the predominant form of urban land use is housing, the majority of this in suburbs. Vast tracts of suburban land were, in the last century, given over to social rented housing, in particular local authority or 'council' housing, and for millions of people 'suburbia' has been experienced through the prism of life as a council tenant. Most academic studies of social rented housing in the United Kingdom have focused on issues such as the management, economics or politics of provision. Relatively little attention has been given to the cultural aspects of social housing, to how it has been experienced by tenants, how their social reality has been mediated through their status as social housing tenants, and how that status has changed over time.

At the moment, local authority tenants in England have apparently been placed in a position of control over the future of their local housing. They can, through a mandatory ballot, exercise a veto over proposed large scale voluntary transfers of council housing to private-sector, not-for-profit Registered Social Landlords, which is the Government's favoured future for the three million or so remaining council dwellings. However, in reality, tenants face no feasible alternative to stock transfer in the light of Treasury borrowing rules and political animosity to council housing provision. In the space of the next decade, therefore, council housing could become a thing of the past. It is, therefore, timely to try to understand how council tenants' social and cultural realities have been shaped by their participation in this social experiment (Ravetz, 2001). This paper, therefore, seeks to further understanding of the reality of council housing as experienced by tenants.

Local authority owned housing, 'council housing', in Britain is a threatened species. For a variety of reasons (beyond the scope of this paper), much, if not all council housing may be transferred to the ownership of other landlords, thus ending almost a century of local state housing provision for working class households. Outside London, most of this housing was suburban in nature and mimicked the middle class suburbs that sprang up around towns and cities in the first half of the last century. It is timely, therefore, to consider whether and how council housing has helped to shape the identity of the people it houses and whether that identity is changing. Moreover, how has the suburban ideal held up in the face of the major social changes which have had an impact on council housing in the last thirty or so years. Ironically, the tenants themselves have a veto on sale of their houses to an alternative landlord and therefore the extent to which their status as a *council* tenant is salient in their self-consciousness may be a factor influencing the way that their vote is cast in any transfer ballot. This paper will discuss these issues with respect to a case study of Doncaster, England, drawing on interviews with council tenants. It attempts to draw out what it means to be a council

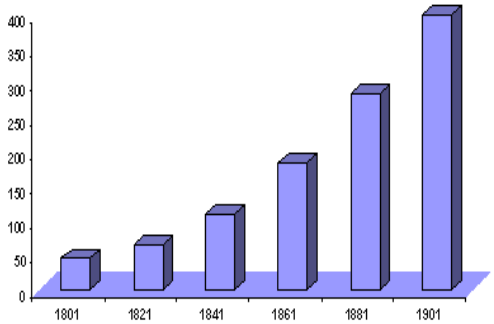


Figure 1: Population of the City of Sheffield, 1801 - 1901 (thousands)

tenant on a council estate; how that identity is socially constructed; how the experiences of men and women have differed and changed; how council tenants are constituted by and constitutive of their collective identity; how they view themselves and are viewed by the rest of the world; and how their identity might affect on their future housing options. 'The discussion of cities . . . is one of the favourite topics of conferences'[1] and there has been similar productivity in the academic literature on suburbanisation. This paper hopes to do more than simply add weight to the numbers. Instead, it aspires to address the suburbanisation experience of the British working classes in a particular geographic, historical and cultural context. The first section will briefly set out the history of suburbanisation in general and in Doncaster in particular. The second section will set out some of the main findings from the research before presenting two exemplars of current council tenants that can be distilled from the research. The subsequent section will consider the implications of the research findings and finally some conclusions will be offered.

Urbanisation (the flow of human beings into cities and towns to escape from rural restrictions or look for urban opportunities) has been a common historical experience in today's developed countries and is still happening in many developing countries. The UK was one of the first to experience this phenomenon and it reached a climax there in the nineteenth century, particularly in London, Birmingham and the northern industrial cities, such as Sheffield (Figure 1).[2] However, while 'men come together to live in cities . . . to live the good life . . . unfortunately many of the ills that offend city dwellers also arise from that same interrelationship'.[3] Hence, while the beginnings of suburbanisation in Britain can be traced back to the eighteenth century,[4] it was in the twentieth century that suburbanisation replaced urbanisation, as the population ebbed away from the central industrial core to seek clean air, privacy and increased social standing.[5] As a result, cities and towns grew bigger and less dense. For example, between the wars the aggregate area of urban land in England rose by fifty per cent while the population grew by less than ten per cent;[6] in London, from 1901 to 1951, the population grew by only a fifth while its land area quadrupled.[7]

In discussing suburbanisation, many authors have portrayed it as primarily a middle class phenomenon. In the case of the UK, at least, and specifically with respect to the industrial northern cities and towns, the working class experience deserves greater attention. Firstly, because more than a quarter of the housing (largely suburban in nature) that was built in the inter-war period, was council housing built for the working classes (Figure 2).[8] Moreover, it was spatially concentrated, and across vast swathes of towns and cities huge estates of working class rented housing became *the* suburban experience.

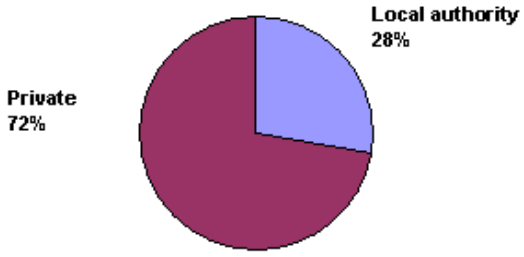


Figure 2: Dwellings built in England and Wales, 1919 - 1939

A second reason for giving council estate suburbia greater attention is that the reasons why council tenants moved there were not the same as middle class reasons for moving to suburbia. Affluent households moved to the suburbs to enjoy a semi-rural lifestyle anchored in the garden city suburb aesthetic that came to dominate new housing developments in the inter-war period. In that, they were chasing an arcadian myth in 'an enlarged hamlet of attractive healthy homes'.[9] They were also trying to escape the unsolicited close proximity of strangers and to create a new '*moral order*' that placed the family at the centre of life, and encompassed privacy, orderliness, homogeneity and gender segregation.[10] In contrast, the suburban estates of council housing, while often sharing the same semi-detached, villagey garden city form, were used to decant working class residents from the cleared inner city slum areas to often quite remote suburban locations. Hence, for these households, the decision to move to the suburbs was a matter of bureaucratic diktat (however benevolent) rather than household choice. However, this did not prevent local authorities from trying to impose middle class morality on the occupants.[11]

This prompts the question of the moral order of the working class suburb or its 'local structure of feeling';[12] that is, the experiential, existential and affective qualities of life and culture peculiar to those estates, at a particular historical

moment. It cannot be assumed that these were identical to the local structure of feeling of the middle class suburbs. Moreover, the local structure of feeling on local authority estates has been subject to phenomenally coruscating exogenous forces, and so is likely to have changed considerably over time.

To explore these issues this paper examines a case study: Doncaster, a large town of 300,000 people, in South Yorkshire, England. Doncaster's twentieth century housing history mirrors that described in general terms above. Doncaster borough now is a market town surrounded by coal-mining townships. However, prior to 1974 the old borough covered only the urban core of the town. When the coal pits were sunk in the early years of the last century, the influx of miners from other areas exacerbated housing problems.[13] In response the Borough Council built a number of new houses for rent, while local colliery owners, prompted by the intervention of the renowned Sir John Tudor Walters M.P, built others. A co-operative of colliery owners formed the Industrial Housing Association Ltd. and used the available government subsidies to launch an ambitious programme of 12,000 houses in the Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields, including several estates in Doncaster, such as Rossington, Armthorpe and Woodlands model village (Figure 3).[14] The Intake estate (Figure 4)[15] was typical of the estates built at this time both by the local authority and by the Industrial Housing Association Ltd. Lying about 2 miles from the town centre, it ultimately consisted

Figure 3: Woodlands model village, Doncaster.
From Sir J. Tudor Walters, *The building of 12,000 houses*.

Figure 4: Model of the Intake Estate, Doncaster

of 900 houses for rent and featured grass verges and trees which gave 'an open, almost rural, feeling to the neighbourhood', making the estate, it was claimed, 'one of the finest suburbs in the country'.[16]

After the Second World War Doncaster's municipal building programme gathered greater pace in response to continuing high demand and a target of 10,000 new dwellings was set with an interim target of 5,500 in the four years to 1950, an output rate which proved totally unachievable in that timescale (Figure 5).[17] As in other towns, council housing in Doncaster reached its maximum in the 1970s. The history of policy in Britain towards local authority housing over the last 30 years is well known. It is a story of impoverishment, under-investment, residualisation and stigmatisation that has left tenants and landlords faced with the prospect of large scale transfer of the stock to housing associations as the only means to remedy some of the problems of the sector (which, ironically, in Doncaster were exacerbated by the inheritance in the 1980s of large numbers of poorly-maintained dwellings from the National Coal Board, the state-owned successor landlord to, among others, the Industrial Housing Association Ltd.). Many of the large British cities and towns have now begun that stock transfer process. However, the legislation gives the tenants the final veto over transfer, and therefore they have to be convinced to vote for change. It is assumed by many commentators that this will be a relatively simple task, since the material benefits on offer to tenants are, allegedly, self-evident. However, this ignores the influence of the local structure of feeling on these estates.

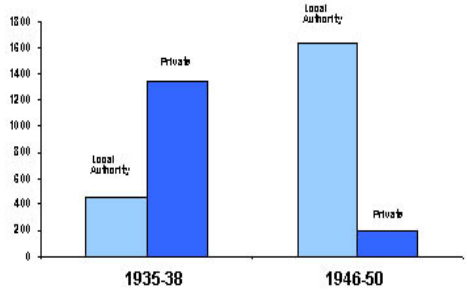


Figure 5: Pre- and post- war house building in Doncaster

This paper draws on discussions with a range of tenants from both the urban core and the outlying 'mining' townships of Doncaster, and was undertaken as part of a wider Ph.D. doctoral thesis. The tenants who participated in the research spanned many generations: their ages ranged from 19 to 78. Some lived alone, others within family groups. Some lived in inner urban flats or maisonettes, others in rural housing or caravans. Many of the older male tenants had had long working lives in the coal mining industry, whilst a significant number of younger tenants mirrored the current national trend of holding only semi- or unskilled, transitory jobs interspersed with significant periods of unemployment. Tenants had varying experiences of council housing as a home. Some, particularly the younger tenants, had lived within the tenure for less than a year whilst other, older tenants had spent the greater part of their lives within the sector.

Many people both young and old who lived as council tenants within the Doncaster communities spoke about how their areas had changed. Their interpretation of change though, was very much dependent on their particular individual circumstances. It was manifested within the research through discussion of both changes to the town, village and local area and also to the 'changing face' of employment. Both the older and the younger tenant spoke about lifestyle change, for example about increases in clinical depression, of rising social apathy, of changing social values and of varying attitudes to and difficulties in obtaining jobs. Many of the older tenants thought that the way children were brought up today was partly to blame for the increasing number of 'bad areas'. A telling remark by such a tenant was indicative of much local opinion:

> '. . . Very refined people used to queue up for the housing – these people have moved away – bought their own homes – been replaced by single people who were more interested in their social lives than looking after children and property'.

Although there was still evidence of the 'traditional mining family' within the research, many spoke of these traditions 'dying out'. There are now a high proportion of single parents (particularly women) clustered in certain areas of the borough. These 'new' families are cited as liking to be supported by '. . . a network of their own'. This 'growth of young mums' attracts according to some a particular form of problem, for example many spoke of issues of young men, alcohol and drug cultures and problems around neighbours, children, dogs and cars. Many thought that there were increasingly fewer households without children and much social change leading to higher child densities and complex relationships.

The centre of Doncaster town was deemed by a significant number of the respondents to have changed radically. There was a view from some of the younger single tenants who lived within the high-rise flats adjacent to the town centre that there was now little work in the town and those facilities that they needed such as shops and leisure opportunities were declining. The standard of housing was thought by such tenants to be '. . . poor and the repairs not done'; some felt isolated within their homes or threatened by '. . . drug pushers in the stairways'. But there was also bravado, a sense that:

> '. . . It's all temporary, but it'll do until something better comes along. They [the Council] should do more - they don't treat us right - they can be very nice [the housing officers] but they don't have to live here. Give them a week and then you would see changes'.

Within the outlying townships some thought modernisation and regeneration had occurred improving both local areas and the opportunity for socialising and that '. . . people now got along better'; but for many there was still evidence of closed communities where outsiders were viewed suspiciously. Most older tenants though, were aware of local networks and thought that their friendships were on the whole with *other* local council tenants and also *knew* whether people were council tenants or not. However, there was uncertainty whether they could or should stick together as a body. This raises a possible question regarding a lack of community cohesion or perhaps it is a consequence of the increasing prevalence of the privatised family unit – mirroring the norms of the middle classes within the suburban setting. Older tenants increasingly alluded to the prevalence of local problems with drugs, drug peddling, music, gangs, parties and children committing arson offences. The Council were subsequently seen as lax in the way that they dealt with such things and as a result 'good' tenants were being driven away. Allocation policies for council housing were seen as weak and many believed that the Council were housing 'deliberate troublemakers'. Within the central flats and maisonettes drug pushers and users were said to be very visible, threatening and '. . . hanging around in the alleys and corridors'.

Many changes were also said to have occurred in terms of work and working relationships. There is little coal mining or heavy engineering in the borough now, little skilled work and much unemployment. Some stated this as

being mirrored in a decline in the will to work, associated with a decrease in the number of available jobs and a rise in the level of local poverty. Many younger male tenants were aware that the nature of the work had changed and spoke of a resistance to such change, of bitterness, of the inability or will to learn new practical skills. Many resented what they saw as unnecessary change from secure employment structures, perhaps mourning the loss of job security that changing employment cultures had brought. Culturally then a view persisted that '. . . the good times were past'; that now the housing existed for those in '. . . real need'; that now the Council has a responsibility to '. . . look after people'. For now there was 'nothing'; that even if you did want a job there was nothing 'locally'. Travelling into Doncaster town centre was seen by a significant number as '. . . too far', the buses were few and expensive and anyway '. . . there's no work there either'.

Local industry had provided in the past '. . . a good enough living'. This was a remark from a tenant that had lived in a council house and worked in traditional industry as a coal miner for over forty years. Amongst such tenants there was a stoical satisfaction, an unstated reliance on a bureaucratic authority. They had never had any problems; the repairs had always been done; they had made few demands. But such individuals are now appearing to be increasingly isolated from the wider communities. Is this because they are now in a minority, or is it because their way of life is also changing and so disappearing? Many of this generation were glad to have had a council house, stating that it was the only way to get a decent house after the war and that the rents were low and therefore affordable. However, there were also regrets: the regret of never having had the status of being homeowners, having '. . . left it too late', or of being stigmatised because of a wider community prejudice against them. The tenure was seen by some of these tenants as being the tenure of those with little choice. Owning your own home was seen as '. . . having the freedom to do what you want'. Lack of choice was for many a significant concern, although there was also an understanding that many people, as a result of illness or disablement, needed improvements and adaptations to their homes that they, as individuals, could never afford and therefore there was a sense of gratefulness to the Council.

Dissatisfaction with the standard of housing provided by the Council was though a common complaint but it was interesting to note that whilst such tenants saw the Council as a body to complain to and about, others objected to these views stating that such people were '. . . wanting everything done . . . they think money grows on trees'. So, whilst stigma and prejudice afflicted what were seen as 'bad' areas there was also within such areas an inherent loyalty to the Council and a view that '. . . if you were hostile you would never get things done'. A significant number of individuals, both young and old felt that there was a need to know the system, to stick to the rules to be seen to be a 'good' tenant. Although it was evident that for many there were times when it was hard to be a 'good' council tenant, that they as individuals or families often felt victimised and discriminated against, that lack of security or understanding of their lifestyles led to isolation and fear. There was also though a view that '. . . [the Council] does their best, that any housing alternatives would be inferior, that it was better to stick with the devil that you know'. Life for particular tenants was a fight and yet this fight in itself was sometimes hard to maintain. However, it has to be remembered that for some this housing was and is their only option in the borough.

Tenants across the spectrum thought that Doncaster will always need council property, that there are lots of people out of work, and that although some of the stock could be demolished and rebuilt to suit tenants' needs, much remains to be done to improve the existing stock. Many tenants spoke of wanting '. . . to stay with the Council', remembering the '. . . horrors of private renting', of being prepared '. . . to fight tooth and nail' and that the '. . . Government would have to change its mind'. Many were opposed to what they saw as 'privatisation of the stock', and that if they '. . . stuck it out and were patient and waited the Government would keep them'. Many were prepared to 'fight' for a better way of life, stating that, at present, all the emphasis was on the stock, when this wasn't the real issue.

The problem with council housing in Doncaster today is seen by some to be a reduction in social and moral standards, a lack of policing and a generally lax attitude towards crime. Many others saw themselves as self-sufficient, as individuals who just wanted a decent house from the Council with as little interference from them as possible. Many only visited Doncaster town centre intermittently and yet there was a view that they wanted '. . . to be the same as others . . . to share facilities and a common goal…but to do this they needed to be given control of what happens . . . the means of being able to handle it themselves'.

Summarising the above evidence, it can be seen that two distinct tenant archetypes can be identified. The first is the older, longer-serving tenant who has a 'constructively critical' attitude towards the Council but who essentially remains 'loyal' to council housing for reasons of collective identity, personal biography, political ideology and self-protection in the face of the unknown. The second is the younger, relatively recent tenant who has an ahistorical attitude towards council housing, does not structure his or her identity with reference to council housing, has no particular affinity with the Council as landlord and is probably less likely to wish to take part in collective activity to 'defend' the sector. To illustrate these two tenant types, two brief oral history case studies are now presented. The first is of an elderly female tenant whom we have called Iris. The second is of a younger man whom we have called Wayne.

Iris's earliest memory of a home was a Victorian terraced house where she had lived with her family. Iris married young before the war and like many of her generation was quickly separated when her husband was called up for active service. The family was 'bombed out' of their home in the war and Iris moved into rooms with her grandma, auntie, mum and brother, as there was no available housing at this time. It was very cramped but everybody locally was the same so it didn't matter. It was a happy time. Then after the war everything changed, her husband returned and the family were moved to a local council house. But this was a different sort of house, it was bigger, and had a modern kitchen, a bathroom and a garden. These were good times. She had had her first child, still lived with 'mum' for support and felt part of a new and growing community. The Council soon moved the young family into their own home nearby. There was still extended family support and yet also the privacy that the growing family needed. Iris was proud of this home; it was her first home of her own.

However, the marriage soon failed which led to another move when Iris left her husband. She lived on her own in privately rented accommodation for a number of years with a growing family. Iris subsequently remarried and applied again for council accommodation, which she quickly acquired. Life for Iris settled into a regular pattern. By now, she was living near the town centre. There were many families close by and a strong community spirit. Everybody helped and borrowed from each other, it was a happy time and the family thrived.

Today Iris is still a council tenant, now like many elderly ladies living alone, but with support. She is grateful for the help that she has received over her life from the Council in providing her with safe and secure housing – but today she says there is little left of the community that she once knew. Everybody has moved away and today all that is left '. . . are bad people, vandals, nuisance makers, drug takers and noise'.

Wayne is a young man of thirty. Today he lives with his girlfriend Tracy and her two small children from previous relationships. Tracy is expecting Wayne's baby later this year. Wayne grew up in Doncaster, living with his mother in relative security in the family bungalow. This bungalow, in which his mother still lives, is even now regarded by Wayne as 'home'.

Wayne married very young and soon became father to two children. This led to his first experience of council housing for when his wife had become pregnant with the second child they had applied for family housing and were soon allocated a four-bedroom house. They lived here for a year until the house was demolished. The family then moved to an old Victorian terraced house that belonged to a housing association. Wayne was happy there but unfortunately the marriage failed and he returned to live with his mother. He soon met Tracy and together they moved into an old urban terraced house in the centre of Doncaster. This was rented from a private landlord and was in a very bad state of repair. It was damp and squalid and they were overcrowded. Wayne was already on the Council waiting list again and becoming increasingly impatient. Conditions were very bad and when the Council offered him his present accommodation he readily accepted. But now he is not so sure that he has done the right thing, he thinks that the Council should have repaired the house before he moved in and now they are 'always on his back' because they are unhappy with the 'repairs and alterations' that Wayne has done. He is also very annoyed that both he and Tracy have been reported to Social Services because the Council were concerned about the welfare of the children. Wayne feels isolated and angry. He says he has to keep pushing, to keep fighting the Council and he finds it hard. Wayne wants a decent home and he doesn't think that he has one.

What can these two composite but typical histories tell us about the suburban experience of working class council tenants in Doncaster and how can they suggest answers to the questions we asked ourselves earlier?

What has it meant to be a tenant on a council estate and how has that experience changed? The longer-standing (usually older) tenants, such as Iris, describe a diminishing social status. Caught between the 'embourgoisement' of many of their fellow citizens on the one hand, and, on the other, the alienation and marginalisation of many others, they have experienced the transformation of their neighbourhoods in cultural and political discourse from suburban ideal to urban dystopia. In the process of these changes, these tenants have been marooned on islands of poverty in a sea of wealth, as better-off households have entered owner-occupation and been replaced by younger and poorer households; often, like Wayne, with chaotic lifestyles and little connection to the stabilising regime of employment or to other cultural anchors to mainstream society.

Such changes in tenant profile, of course, reflect wider economic, social and political processes that have taken place. Nevertheless, the result can, at this level, be characterised as a tenant transformation that has important implications for the future role of council housing in Britain.

These examples illustrate how the homogeneity of the early suburban council estates has disappeared. For analytical purposes we can now consider the two broad groups that make up the tenant base. The Iris group is a relict of the 'respectable working class' that formed the original tenant base for council housing in the first half of the twentieth century. Culturally, this group shared many attitudes with the suburban middle classes: a strong sense of order and duty; high standards of domestic cleanliness and rectitude; a suspicion of outsiders; a commitment to family

and home; and, gender segregation. On the other hand, there were important differences from the middles classes too: a tradition of (perhaps sporadic) collective action (through trade unions, co-operative societies, working men's clubs, tenants' groups and so on, manifested in landlord-tenant disputes through rent-strikes, for example); and, a relative immobility, making it harder to move out of a deteriorating area. Nevertheless, this group could be seen as being in tune with typical suburban values. They also display a certain level of loyalty to the Council and to the notion of council housing itself.

The crisis in this suburban idyll began in the 1970s, when unemployment, economic instability and political hostility towards council housing combined with ongoing under-investment and the effects of homelessness legislation to drive out those who could afford to go, replacing them with increasingly disruptive and socially excluded households: the Waynes. A blurring of the boundaries with private rented housing - historically the abode of the *'lumpenproletariat'*, and urban rather than suburban in nature - occurred as a result. These new tenants are more likely to be footloose and to lack any political or other commitment to council housing. Nor are they likely to have such strong ties with their local neighbourhood, and are less inclined, therefore, towards collective activities centred on the locality. Perhaps more importantly, they lack the older tenants' sense of gratitude towards the Council and willingness to tolerate its shortcomings; they are more demanding and complaining. These new tenants have brought with them a more urban lifestyle, and created a different structure of feeling, undermining the estates' original suburban ethos.

One outcome of this is the transformation of gender roles on the estates. It is no longer the norm for the men to go out to work and for the women to inhabit the domestic sphere, as was the case when the estates were developed. Unemployment in traditionally male industries, such as coal mining and heavy engineering, means that many council estate households now have no adults in employment, while in others the female partner may work part-time in the growing service sector while the male stays at home. As Beatrix Campbell has observed[18], however, this does not mean males in general have taken dominion over the domestic and the local, which are still seen as the worlds of women.

Many of the 'Iris' tenants see themselves (as council tenants) stigmatised by the rest of society. They feel their status has declined from a time when 'very refined' people used to live on the estate. Nevertheless, they are mostly positive about council housing in itself and the Council's housing department. They are much more likely to be dissatisfied with the area and the local environment and are highly critical of the Council for allowing 'undesirable' tenants to move onto their estates. These once attractive suburbs have suffered from years of neglect and under-funding by central government. To the older tenants there is nothing inherently wrong with being a council tenant, but many feel that, financially, they have missed out on accumulating the housing wealth which owner-occupation can generate. It is also clear that council housing is seen in a good light compared to housing association housing and, especially, to private renting.

From the discussion above, we may venture a few conclusions. The first is that the relatively strong commitment to council housing, particularly among the older, more traditional tenants, combined with the fear of the unknown in the shape of alternative landlords, may make the outcome of any stock transfer ballots unpredictable. Yet the alternatives to stock transfer are not clearly set out. Perhaps it is time for the British Government to recognise and take note of tenants' views and aspirations and to devise alternative future scenarios for council housing that allow it to continue to play the role it was originally established to play.

On a wider note, a second conclusion, or rather a question, can be formulated: can working class suburbia be retrieved? Council housing gave working class families the chance to take part in the suburban experience. For more than a generation distinctly working class suburbia thrived in Britain's cities and towns. However, over the last thirty years a crushing combination of circumstances has changed the face of council estates and laid waste to their suburban ideal. The quality of middle class suburbs is maintained by means of two mechanisms. First, the market power of these households creates exclusive neighbourhoods only accessible to relatively affluent families. Second, in the event of the deterioration of a neighbourhood, for whatever reason, the middle classes can vote with their feet by moving out. Neither of these mechanisms operates for the suburban council tenant. Being outside the market, they have been unable to exercise consumer power to 'vet' new arrivals. But neither have they the power of exit from their estates because the bureaucratic tenancy rules make internal transfer difficult. 'Local lettings policies', in which tenants have greater influence on the allocation of housing in their neighbourhood, and 'choice-based lettings', in which the tenant is given greater consumer sovereignty, are currently receiving consideration. There are some dangers inherent in giving tenants more local power in this way,[19] but if the ethos of working class suburbia is to be revived, then some such changes will probably be necessary.

Thirdly, the economic plight of the 'Waynes' has to be addressed. Within Doncaster and other towns and cities, the mobility of council tenants is limited by the poor quality and expensiveness of public transport. And yet, much of the employment local to the estates has now disappeared. This has implications for land-use planning. The monolithic

residential homogeneity of suburban council estates needs to give way to more mixed-use planning that will allow employment to be brought back to the estates.

Our final conclusion is that the utopian ideal of working class suburbia, made manifest through council housing estates, has not survived the changing times. Yet, rather than expecting council tenants to vote themselves out of existence, the Government should build on their strengths, tackle their problems, and enter a new partnership with council tenants to create a new structure of meaning on suburban estates.

References

1 Taylor *et al.* (*op.cit*.), p.312

2 Adapted from Taylor, I., Evans, K. and Fraser, P., (1996), *A tale of two cities: a study in Manchester and Sheffield*, London: Routledge, Table 2.1, p. 39.

3 Haar, Charles, M. and Iatridis, Demetrius, S. (1974), *Housing the poor in suburbia: public policy at the grass roots*, Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company.

4 Thompson, F.M.L., (1982), *The rise of suburbia,* Leicester University Press.

5 *ibid*.

6 J.W.R. Whitehand and Christine M.H. Carr, (1999), 'England's interwar suburban landscapes: myth and reality', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25, 4, 483-501.

7 Schoon, Nicholas, (2001), *The chosen city*, London: Spon Press.

8 Adapted from Lowndes Sanderson, M. (1991), *Housing in Doncaster*, Doncaster Library Services, p. 81.

9 John Burns, President of the Local Government Board speaking in 1910, quoted in Meacham, Standish, (1999), *Regaining paradise: Englishness and the early garden city movement*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

10 Baumgartner, M.P., (1988), *The moral order of a suburb*, Oxford University Press.

11 The Doncaster Municipal Tenants' Handbook (undated) suggests 'there should be a strong disposition on the part of the tenants to use properly the privileges they have, and to do everything they can to help to get for all others the means of 'living in a civilized way".

12 Taylor *et al*. (*op. cit*.), p.312.

13 Lowndes Sanderson (*op.cit*.).

14 Lowndes Sanderson (*op.cit*.).

15 Lowndes Sanderson (*op.cit*.).

16 Lowndes Sanderson (*op.cit*.).

17 Lowndes Sanderson (*op.cit*.).

18 Campbell, Beatrix, (1993), *Goliath*, London: Methuen.

19 Cole, Ian, Iqbal, Barbara, Slocombe, Louise, and Trott, Tony, (2001), Social engineering or consumer choice: rethinking housing allocations, Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing/York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

John Hughes is a Lecturer in the Department of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Sheffield, U.K. His teaching and research specialisms are in housing. He has undertaken research for the Economic and Social Research Council, the Department of Local Government, Transport and the Regions and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, among others.

Sheila Owen is currently a doctoral research student in the Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, U.K. Her research focuses on the negotiation of housing change at the local level. Prior to coming to Sheffield, she was a Policy Officer/Researcher for the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff.

Subsidiary Papers

The following are two papers on aspects of suburbia that were presented as part of the National Trust Wyatt Conservation Series of lectures in 2002.

‘No small undertaking’: The Disastrous History of the Commonwealth War Service Homes Commission, 1919-1925.

John Johnson

‘A scheme, in which it was anticipated by the Minister that an expenditure of fifty millions of money would be involved, was no small undertaking. When it is remembered that the bulk of this money was to be expended in separate amounts of seven and, latterly, eight hundred pounds on the construction of houses under various conditions throughout Australia, it is obvious that the utmost care and highest degree of efficiency would be necessary to obtain satisfactory results.’[1]

War Service Homes Commission

On the 21st of July 1919 Mr. Denison Miller, governor of the Commonwealth Bank, laid the foundation stone of the first War Service home in Kennedy Avenue Belmore. Pious hopes were expressed for the scheme, which would enable returned soldiers on modest incomes to buy their own homes. Senator Grant pointed out that due to the shortage of housing throughout Australia many thousands of veterans needed homes. Other speakers at the ceremony included the Mayor of Canterbury, numerous politicians and Colonel Walker, War Service Homes Commissioner. Yet less than 2 years later, despite having financed or built over 16,000 homes, the Commission was the subject of Public Accounts Committee investigations, the Minister was under fire, not enough homes were built and some of those stood vacant, the press was unrelentingly hostile and Colonel Walker himself had been sacked. What went wrong? What turned a public relations triumph into such a debacle?

‘A scheme applicable to ordinary wage-earners’

At the end of World War 1 the process of demobilizing nearly 250,000 Australian soldiers triggered an enormous effort. Repatriation, as it was uniquely known in Australia, spawned an entire government department (Department of Repatriation, later Department of Veterans Affairs) and a host of schemes to assist veterans. Pensions, soldier settlement farms, training schemes, repatriation hospitals and ongoing medical care were some of the efforts made. The War Service Homes Commission was an integral part of the repatriation machinery set up in December 1918 to provide

housing for returned soldiers. The Commission was given the task of providing up to 8,000 houses per year, a difficult task given the shortages of building material and skilled labour at the time.

The establishment of the War Service Homes Commission was a matter of extreme haste. In December 1918 Senator E.D. Millen, then Repatriation Minister, introduced the War Service Homes Bill to the Commonwealth Parliament just after the armistice. This was one of the first government actions after the end of the war and was obviously an attempt by the government to demonstrate that Australia was returning to peacetime conditions.

The Bill was designed to provide homes for veterans and also widows and parents of deceased soldiers. With the downturn in house building during WWI, Australia was suffering a housing shortage. As *Building* magazine put it 'the invasion of Australia by brides has added to the remarkable scarcity of homes; so much so that there are said to be nearly 20,000 short in the Metropolitan area of Sydney alone.'[2] Thus, as well as providing veterans with the tangible compensation of a new house, the scheme would do double duty by easing the housing crisis. With soldiers returning to Australia in large numbers, the possibility of social dislocation and civil unrest was very real. Repatriation was an important tool in the re-engineering of Australian society after the war.

The scheme provided for a maximum payment of £700, which was raised to £800 in 1920, for returned servicemen, or the widows or parents of casualties (if they had died on active service). Senator Millen envisaged a total expenditure in the order of £50,000,000, equivalent to perhaps $10 billion in current terms. The scheme was aimed specifically at average workers, not the well off. According to Senator Millen:

> *The reaching power of an applicant is limited by his weekly income…Our aim is to establish a scheme which will be applicable to ordinary wage-earners…we must give them a scheme…by which they can acquire accommodation for a sum not greater than they now pay as rent. The interest rate must therefore be kept low otherwise the weekly payments will be too high for the majority of these men to take advantage of the scheme*.[3]

As early as July 1917, Senator Millen approached the Commonwealth Bank to become part of the War Services Homes scheme. In January 1918 Denison Miller, Governor of the Commonwealth Bank, agreed to the Bank's involvement. He then left the country. After months of negotiations with the Deputy Governor, no satisfactory arrangements could be made. Senator Millen then negotiated with various state banks, only for Denison Miller to offer the Commonwealth Bank's facilities at a late stage to become part of the scheme.[4]

Many other parts of the repatriation system had been put in place well before the finish of the war. Substantial efforts were being devoted to farming schemes as early as 1916.[5] It seems curious that while so much early attention was paid to soldier settlement schemes, suburban housing was given little administrative weight until after the end of the war. Some of the delay can be attributed to the Commonwealth Bank's intransigence, but perhaps the myth of the bush was more attractive to government than the reality of an overwhelmingly suburban population.

The Commission was the third corporate body founded by the Commonwealth, after the Commonwealth Bank and Commonwealth Railways. The Commissioner was given sweeping powers to buy land and building materials, as well as autonomy in appointing and dismissing staff. Problems in obtaining building materials were anticipated, and the Commissioner was authorized to negotiate the buying of materials in large quantities. Land purchases beyond £5,000 had to be approved by the Minister, but beyond this the Commissioner was given a virtually free hand to run the Commission as he saw fit. How houses were built, by day labour or by contract, was left open for the Commissioner to decide. The position of Commissioner clearly required an administrator of considerable experience, but the salary of £1500 per year was probably too low to attract the kind of person adept at handling a budget of over £6,000,000 per year and supervising an administration with branches in every state.

'A wide reputation for crude fearlessness'

In March 1919 the first commissioner was appointed. Lt. Colonel James Walker was a building contractor from Queensland who had served in the Boer War and WW1. Born in Ireland in 1863 he had emigrated to Australia in about 1881 and settled in Charters Towers, then a thriving gold town, and made his living as a builder. Peter Bell describes Charters Towers as being a sophisticated permanent town by 1890. 'No other North Queensland mining town ever approached [Charters Towers'] level of complexity and prosperity.'[6] It is possible that Walker came to Australia to look for gold, but he clearly grasped the opportunities available for a capable builder in the booming gold town. In 1897 he married Emily Jane Meredith at Charters Towers. Walker served as a lieutenant with the Imperial forces in South Africa and was awarded the Queen's Medal with three clasps. After his return to Queensland he served in the Queensland Volunteer Reserves. He continued as a building contractor in Charters Towers and his business included other projects in Northern Queensland.[7]

At the outbreak of the war Walker was working on supervising the building of a reservoir on Thursday Island when war broke out.[8] Walker enlisted in August 1914 and was commissioned as captain with the 25th Battalion of the

AIF (an all-Queensland unit). The 25th Battalion saw service at Gallipoli and later in Belgium and France. Walker, promoted first to Major and then Lieutenant Colonel, commanded the Battalion briefly at Gallipoli and again in France. C.E.W. Bean described Walker as 'a contractor, accustomed to the handling of men, and in the A.I.F. he had a wide reputation for crude fearlessness based on deliberate exposure of himself to danger':

> *On 18th June 1916, in the wretched trenches opposite Messines, Walker found the men in a sector of his front line somewhat cowed by an enemy sniper. The company commander, Captain R.J. Lewis had just been shot through the brain while looking over the parapet, and the same fate had befallen the man who took his place. A number of periscopes were broken. "Always this talk of getting shot!" he exclaimed. "We'll see if they can shoot." Putting his elbows on the parapet, he looked over. After one bullet and then another had narrowly missed his head - "The man's a damn bad shot," he said. "That was six inches away. Here, give us a rifle and I'll teach the beggar." As he took the rifle another bullet hit the sandbags. After letting the German have a fourth shot to show where he was, "There you are, me man!" exclaimed Walker, and fired. Though he was a very good shot, it is hardly likely that he hit his opponent; but an eyewitness has stated that, whatever the reason, the German ceased fire.*[9]

Walker was clearly a man who did not hesitate to put himself in the line of fire to inspire his men. This did not prevent him from being blamed for the failure of the attack on Flers by the battalion and he was invalided out of the AIF soon after in April 1917. Bob Doneley suggests that this was probably an unfair judgement and it did not prevent the award of a DSO and the Serbian Order of the White Eagle, 4th Class.[10] Walker returned to Australia and spent the rest of the war involved in the call-up of reservists.

'Carry out a vigorous building policy'

Walker quickly appointed Deputy Commissioners to run the state branches, without any reference to the Minister and some of the staff appointments turned out rather badly. The appointment of Major W.D.J. Evans as Deputy Commissioner for NSW is a good example. Appointed in April he commenced duty in NSW on the 6th of May. Walker (with Millen's permission) dismissed him on the 20th of June, over the £25,000 purchase of the Mount Bardwell Estate, a purchase that Walker had directed him to negotiate. The land, at Bardwell Park, proved totally unsuitable for subdivision and Walker alleged that Evans had exceeded his £1000 delegation for land purchase. Evans alleged that Walker had authorized the purchase and he took his case to the papers. Questions were raised in Parliament but the case quickly disappeared from sight.[11] It was a bad omen for the scheme under Walker's administration, but much worse was to come. Between April 1919 and March 1920 four people held the post of Deputy Commissioner in NSW. Over a similar period Tasmania had five Deputy Commissioners. No organization could perform effectively with that level of instability.[12]

In June 1919 the Commonwealth Bank was commissioned to act as agent for the War Service Homes Scheme for individual houses, with the Commissioner having ultimate authority over the entire scheme. The Bank's official architects, J. & H.G. (John & Herwald) Kirkpatrick, were responsible for the design and supervision of the houses erected by the Bank. The firm set up offices in every state to deal with the work of supervising houses throughout the country.[13] Thus two organisations responsible for building homes were established in tandem, with one being responsible to the other. The potential for friction was considerable and an overlap between functions inevitable. Less than two months later the foundation stone of the first War Service Homes Commission house was laid. It had been designed by Kirkpatricks and financed by the Commonwealth Bank.[14]

A number of the state banks had experience in financing home-building schemes and would have made ideal partners in the scheme. Thus the Commonwealth lost the opportunity to take advantage of this valuable expertise. Indeed the early phases of the scheme were notable for an amateurism of remarkable proportions. Poorly suited candidates were appointed simply because they were veterans. Walker appointed comrades from the 25th Battalion, such as Lieutenant Colonel Toll and Captain J. Tait, to senior positions in the Commission. Tait was appointed as Deputy Commissioner for Victoria and there is little to suggest he had any qualifications for the position except his friendship with Walker.[15] Certainly veterans formed the bulk of staff; Walker testifying in March 1921 that 98 per cent of the 600 odd staff was returned soldiers.[16]

Rather than availing himself of the expertise available in established bodies such as the Commonwealth Works Department and the Surveyor General's Department Walker appointed an entirely new staff of his own to do the work of designing houses and surveying estates. As the PAC put it 'the Commonwealth-Surveyor General could have done all that was necessary in regard to land transactions and subdivision.'[17]

Walker appointed J.J.C. Morrell FRIBA (later Deputy Commissioner for NSW) to head the section designing houses. Morrell had been an architect with the Victorian Public Works Department and was sent on an overseas town planning tour in 1914. He presented a report on his travels in 1915 and was involved in an abortive garden suburb adjacent to the Lithgow Small Arms Factory in 1918. His scheme was criticized for excessively curved streets, odd-

shaped allotments and high servicing costs. John Sulman designed an alternative layout that was adopted.[18] Morrell had applied for the position of Commissioner but despite his extensive experience and qualifications he did not possess the one essential qualification - active military service during the War. This did not prevent Walker appointing him Director General of Works in Melbourne, without advertising the position. Morrell's appointment was severely criticized by the Returned Soldiers' League, as they felt it contravened the policy of appointing veterans to all positions in the Commission. Walker, the man who stuck his head up to get shot at, apparently was not worried by criticism or the niceties of government policy.[19]

Morrell, as the Director of Lands for the Commission, was disparagingly referred to by the Public Accounts Committee as an 'enthusiast in town planning'. They cited an estate he designed (location unknown) where:

> *a very pretty design of curves was prepared. There were nineteen "open spaces" in the plan, but no provision was made for their upkeep. The layout was not an attempt to adapt the scheme to an undulating contour which would have been perfectly proper and sensible. The area in question was practically level, and it required no special criticism of the design of the town planner to demonstrate that it provided a minimum number of allotments, while the expense of road-making, sewerage, &c., was considerably in excess of what would have been necessary with a simpler lay-out.*[20]

In October 1919 W.J. Earle, then Deputy Commissioner in Tasmania, was sent to NSW. He was directed 'to carry out a vigorous building policy, as New South Wales will require 3,400 dwelling-houses before the end of the financial year.' To put this in perspective, this is nearly as many houses as the War Service Homes Commission managed to build Australia-wide between 1919 and June 1922![21] This astonishing request was accompanied by instructions to,

'(1) purchase sufficient land for the erection of 5,000 houses;
(2) immediately commence a vigorous building policy; and
(3) report upon the organization and administration of the New South Wales office.'[22]

Purchasing land was easier than building houses, and Earle proceeded to do so. Unfortunately Earle proved not much better than Evans did in selecting land for subdivision, particularly in the Newcastle area. For example, Roe's Estate in Waratah was described by the Town Clerk of Waratah as 'absolutely the worst land' in the area and the Chief Inspector of Works stated that 'this land should never have been built on, for when I visited the group…there were 9 inches of water on the whole of this land, and I could not get nearer than 100 feet.'[23]

Earle had not exactly covered himself in glory, but by 1921 he was acting Government Town Planner of South Australia and in 1926 his appointment as city planner in Brisbane made him the first planner employed by local government in Australia.[24] He was one of the few major figures involved in the Commission debacle to survive with his career intact, probably because he got out early.

In the rush to build houses a variety of ingenious methods were used. Reinforced concrete was used for construction in the Great Central Railway Estate in Belfield, near Canterbury.[25] The use of a small number of standard house designs in an estate was obviously a device to reduce the cost and construction time of groups of houses. Thus the near identical houses in Vimy and Restwell Streets, Bankstown, is testimony to the rush to house returned servicemen. However variation was maintained by using different standard designs next to each other and also by reversing the standard designs (as was done in Launcelot Street, Enfield).

War Service Homes Estates in Sydney 1920-24[26]

Suburb	Estate, Street/s	Comments
Auburn	J Curr's Estate, vicinity of Salisbury St	
Bankstown	Fripp's Estate, Vimy, Ross and Restwell Sts	50 houses built 1921-23
	E.N. Rowley Estate, Canterbury Rd to Jellicoe St	No houses known to have been built
Belfield	Great Central Railway Estate, Bazentin St to Linda St	At least 50 reinforced concrete houses built 1921
Belmore	Towers Estate, Robert St to Kingsgrove Rd	At least 50 houses built
	New Railway Estate, Minnie St to Lucerne St	Adjacent to Great Central Railway Estate
Bexley	Ay Ah Bee (later Olive Branch) Estate, Locksley Rd to Leslie Rd and Regent & Haig St	At least 100 houses built 1921-22
Chatswood	Royal Park Estate, Fontaine and Lamette Sts	Developed from 1924 on
Concord	Allenby's Estate, Dennison and Albion Sts, Kitchener Ave	

	Walker's Land, Boronia and Currawang Sts	
Earlwood	Proutsbridge Estate, Vicinity of Mons St	
Earlwood /Campsie	Cup and Saucer Estate, Narani Cres to Ferrier Pde	At least 100 houses built
Enfield	Wilson and Case Estate, Launcelot Ave and Burwood Rd	15 houses built 1921-22
Five Dock	Five Dock? Possibly Lenore and Undine Sts	
	Fairlight Extension Estate, Probably Rickard St & First Ave	
Gladesville	Thompson St	
Greenacre	Chullora Estate, Jean and Margaret Sts and Roberts Rd	At least 13 houses built, 2 survive
Greystanes	Eastview Estate, Vicinity of Cyril and Yvonne Sts	
Lakemba	Hillview Estate, Hillview St and Prestige Ave	
Lidcombe	Marne Park Estate, Jellicoe St to Gallipoli St	Up to 100 houses built
	Darcy Park Estate, D'arcy Ave and Eglington St	
Lindfield	Lightcliff Ave	Developed from 1924 on
Matraville	Bunnerong Estate, Harold St and Australia Ave	
Merrylands	Locksley Hall Estate, Vicinity of William and Mombri Sts	
Oatley	Como Lakes Estate, Vicinity of Haig St	
Punchbowl	Dr Tuckers Estate, Probably Lancelot St	
Roseville	Hemsley Estate, Barambah and Barcoo Sts	Developed from 1924 onwards
Roseville East	Plateau Estate, Probably Malvern and Duntroon Aves	
Sans Souci	Sandgate Estate, Griffiths and Napoleon Sts	15 houses built 1921
Westmead	Parramatta Park Estate, Old Hawkesbury Rd	Now the site of Westmead Hospital
Wentworthville	Fullagar Road	Houses built 1920
Willoughby	Sunnybank Estate, Vicinity of Laurel St	

The houses built by the Commission are a compendium of bungalow styles from the early 1920s: California Bungalows, Craftsman Bungalows, Colonial Bungalows, Indian Bungalows executed in roughcast stucco or dark brickwork. The early houses are often tiny, consisting of only 2 bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom, laundry and living room. Despite their size, wasted space is notable in some designs. The Craftsman bungalows in Vimy Street, Bankstown and Launcelot Street, Enfield, for example, have what appear to be sleepouts as well as large porches at the front. Most of these sleepouts show evidence of having been enclosed at an early stage. Presumably the occupants needed interior space more than outdoor sleeping areas of dubious utility. Most were built on small blocks, around 40 feet by 140 feet.

War Service Homes Estates in Newcastle 1920-22[27]

Suburb	Estate	Comments
Adamstown	King's Road Estate	At least 56 houses built 1920-21
	Merewether Estate	At least 24 houses built 1920-21
Mayfield	Mayfield Estate	At least 20 houses built 1920-21
	Platt's Estate	No houses known to have been built
	Crebert Street Estate	No houses known to have been built
Waratah	Maud Street Estate	No houses known to have been built
	Roe's Estate	At least 65 houses built 1920-21
	Vera Street Estate	No houses known to have been built

Gordon S. Keesing writing in *Building* in 1920 commented on an estate at 'Larcombe (sic), near Sydney', presumably either the Marne Park Estate or Darcy Park Estate at Lidcombe. His remarks are worth quoting at length as they sum up much of the negative and positive reaction to the group houses built by the Commission. He wrote:

> *The blocks are good, with good frontages, and large enough to enable owners to have both vegetable and flower gardens, and in addition a good drying ground. The houses are built of first-class material, and the finish is good for this class of residence. The appearance is fairly satisfactory.*
>
> *The homes have been built at a low cost. The Minister stated that the tenders received were £900, but the houses built by day labour only cost net £715 and £745, including cost of land. I have heard, however, that the construction has been altered since they were tendered for - for example, in the roofs, as tendered for, there was a remarkable waste of timber. This is hearsay.*
>
> *The interior arrangement is unsatisfactory. The windows and doors have been placed without any regard to the position of essential furniture. The tiny rooms have so many doors and windows that some of these will need blocking in the best bedrooms, to enable a double bed, wardrobe and dressing table to be placed in the rooms.*

> *The extraordinary kitchenette-laundries, which are mere cupboards, give no space for a table near the stove, and the washing copper, which is placed adjacent to the stove, is never adjacent to the wash troughs, and in some of the houses, [washing] has to be carried dripping to wash troughs fixed in an adjoining lobby.*
> *There are only two bedrooms, and no other part of the house can be improvised for sleeping. Owners must not, therefore, have more than one child. There is no provision for extension. It is next to criminal, in my opinion, to let newly-married couples undertake a time payment proposition like this with such minimum accommodation, unless the house has special provision for extension. This is a simple planning problem. Each owner should be given a plan showing the enlarged home. He could then add, if he had more than one child, without having to move his home, or go to large expense adding to a nucleus not suitable in roof and plan for straightforward additions.*
> *These houses, as built, are the best examples I have seen, outside flat buildings, of landlords restricting birth, and the landlord is the Commonwealth of Australia.*
> *Senator Millen stated that only sixteen houses had been built (they are not all finished yet): but then he said: "We have had difficulties with labor, etc., the same as private individuals who have had much delay in getting homes and business premises built." Granted. But will Senator Millen seriously say that if sixteen private returned architects had been entrusted with the work twelve months back, they would only have one house apiece erected? The number would be nearer 160, and many Government salaries and much of the taxpayers' money would have been saved.*[28]

Perhaps in response to this bad publicity, a high-powered delegation was invited to inspect the work of the Commission in Sydney. Invited from the Institute of Architects were 'President, G. Sydney Jones and Past President, Arthur Pritchard … and President John Sulman and Vice President George A. Taylor of the Town Planning Association.' The current Deputy Commissioner Hutchings and Frank I'Anson Bloomfield, Chief Architect for NSW, conducted the tour. They spent nearly a day 'examining the designs for cottages, the lay-out of estates and the actual construction that is being carried out.' The group came away impressed that 'a great department is being established and is carrying out a great programme of constructional work' and that 'this department is going to be a great rival to the private practitioner'. Considering that George Taylor was owner and editor of *Building*, this was a useful publicity jaunt. Having the major figures of both the planning and architecture institutes praising the Commission's work was a major coup.[29]
By this time Walker had fallen out with the Commonwealth Bank and the agency agreement was terminated in April 1920. There had been a dispute over the architects' fees, which had been charged to the Commission instead of the applicants. Some doubt was expressed about the quality of supervision by the architects J. & H.G. Kirkpatrick, and Walker felt that the Bank was competing against the Commission for land and contractors. The excuse given was that the Commission 'had so developed as to be in a position to proceed with individual applications.'[30] Given the mess that was developing, the last thing the Commission needed was more work supervising construction.

'The only things true to specification are the doorknobs and grate'

According to *Smiths Weekly,* if 'you see an empty house with a ruined garden, broken windows and doors, and holes in the fences anywhere around Sydney, it's safe to bet that it belongs to the War Service Homes Commission.'[31] *Smiths Weekly* (the self-styled battler's friend) mounted an aggressive campaign against the Commission as it did against most other aspects of the repatriation system. *Smiths Weekly* was not alone and the government was forced to ask the Public Accounts Committee to examine the purchase of timber areas in Queensland and their subsequent use in September 1920.[32] While these purchases were generally found to be reasonable, the report opened a can of worms regarding the administration of the Commission.

The PAC found that vast quantities of building materials had been bought, millions of bricks stockpiled and sometimes forests and timber mills were bought as well as finished timber. Private contractors had built many houses, but some had been built by the Commission, using day labour, because of the pressure to get as many finished as possible. Evidence of wastage, fraud and lax account keeping were uncovered. It is likely that the Commission's activities exacerbated the rise in prices of land and building costs that were such a feature of the post-war period. A further 11 PAC reports followed over the next 3 years. Each State branch was examined in detail, and each branch was found deficient in its own unique fashion.

In New South Wales some houses were found to be poorly built. *Smiths Weekly* exposed some shoddily built houses in Goulburn:

> *One woman fell through the floor of her kitchen; there are many crooked doorways and bulging walls. In six feet one wall is an inch out of true. Some walls are wider by a foot at one end than at the other! A theodolite*

> *is almost needed to find the way from room to room. One of the tenants swears that the only things in his house true to specifications are the doorknobs and the grate.*[33]

These particular houses were built by a local builder and supervised by a local architect, the builder's son, appointed by J. & H.G. Kirkpatrick. According to the PAC the construction had been 'deliberately and willfully scamped by the contractor with the connivance of the local supervising architect, his son.' Strictly speaking the Commission was not to blame for the situation, but by this stage it hardly seemed to matter.

By late 1920 the end was in sight. The Commissioner had estimated that £10,000,000 was needed for operations in the 1920-21 financial year. Senator Millen reduced this to £7,000,000 and Treasury allocated £6,000,000. Walker continued to authorize expenditure as though the higher amount was available. On the 6th of November 1920 Treasury informed Walker that over £4,000,000 had been authorized. Walker, supported by Assistant Minister Rogers, requested an extra £5,500,000 budget allocation from Treasury. On the 6th of December Walker and Millen had an interview with the Treasurer. An extra £1,000,000 was granted, mainly out of War Service Homes receipts. There was no scope for keeping within the budget without savage cuts. All expenditure except finishing work on hand was suspended. No more existing houses were financed, land purchases stopped (with 2,500 acres of land already bought this was no bad thing) and no new houses were begun.[34]

Walker was made the scapegoat for all the Commission's failings and in March 1921 he was removed from office on the excuse of an earlier insolvency. The speed with which this occurred was truly remarkable. Senator A.S. Rodgers, acting Minister in Senator Millen's absence was informed of Walker's insolvency on the 9th of March. On the 10th of March Walker was questioned by Rogers regarding the insolvency. On the 11th the Solicitor General reported that Walker had been an uncertified insolvent at the time of his appointment and Walker was given a week's leave of absence. On the 18th his appointment was annulled by the Governor General. Walker was replaced by Colonel J.M. Semmens who was made acting War Service Homes Commissioner as well as being Chairman of the Repatriation Commission.[34] Walker was to have had a street named after him in Enfield. After his fall from grace it was discretely renamed Launcelot Street.[35]

The government was clearly delighted at the opportunity to be rid of Walker without a messy dismissal. He had proved a disastrous choice as Commissioner and his appointment still had five years to run. Walker continued his career as a building contractor, ironically becoming quite well known working for the Commonwealth as a contractor in Canberra.[36]

Building magazine pontificated mightily on the Commission shortly thereafter, under the heading 'Failure and money wasting - The danger of government control':

> *At the outset 'Building' was emphatic in its assertions that the Federal Government should not come into the building market to compete with private practitioners in architecture and building, that it could not hope to build at a profit or even at a figure that would mean any saving in the long run, and that the War Service Homes Commission should close down before the cost to the nation would be any greater. Since then the Commission has squandered thousands of pounds in useless speculation and badly built homes*.[37]

Building had said no such things at the outset, but a degree of professional jealousy seems apparent. This is underlined by their defense of Kirkpatricks' Commonwealth Bank work in the same article, when it was stated that 'a comparison between the Commission's work and that of private practitioners can be made, and makes one wonder in view of the superiority of the work by its architects, why the Bank was instructed not to sign any more contracts.' This, despite the fact that the construction of the shoddiest houses in the whole scheme (the defective houses in Goulburn previously referred to) was supervised by a private architect appointed by Kirkpatricks.

The Commission's activities were wound back and much of the unused building material sold. Because of the recession that occurred at this time huge losses were incurred. By August 1923 losses on the sale of material and cancellation of contracts amounted to at least £600,000, with further losses anticipated. Vacant building land that had cost over £400,000 to purchase was lying idle and 204 houses which had cost over £150,000 were unsold.[38] The building work of the Commission virtually ceased. In July 1922 it was reported that 'for over a year the building and purchasing of homes for those eligible under the Act [has] been almost at a standstill.'[39] A large proportion of the loss that occurred may be put down to the rigorous reduction in the building programme. If the Commission had continued building, the sales would have been unnecessary. The losses represent the result of a fundamental change of government policy.

'A grave reflection on the judgement of those responsible'

The 1919-22 estates in Sydney and Newcastle were in the inexpensive fringe areas and many estates had poor access to transport, but were often close to big employers such as the Chullora Railway Workshops. Few other concessions to then current town planning thought are apparent. Estates were mainly laid out on gridiron lines, parks were not included in subdivisions, no thought was given to community facilities and drainage of estates was often (and sometimes still is) a problem. Many estates give the impression of having been hastily planned, with little regard to the amenity of the occupants. They were clearly intended to house ordinary working people, while the Commonwealth Bank catered for better-off applicants who usually had their own block and were often able to pay more than the £700 or £800 limit.

The estates were a failure in many ways. Some returned servicemen were reluctant to live in the War Services Commission homes. According to Earle Page 'they say that a group of 30 or 40 houses all much of one type of construction suggests to them an internment camp. They have had enough of the war and do not want to be reminded of it.'[40] Page was a vigorous critic of the whole repatriation system and as leader of the newly formed Country Party he felt the money should have been spent on grand national rebuilding projects. Page no doubt felt that a scheme to build suburban housing was exactly the opposite of what was required.

Building magazine joked about the 'open air life' on the fringes of Sydney but stated that as many veterans 'have had four years of it, associated with a living hell, this aspect is not an attractive one.'[41] The writer in *Building* appears to have been referring specifically to the rural soldier settlements like that at Milperra, but the unsuitable nature of some of the estates (such as those in Newcastle) and lack of transport and facilities in many of the estates were quite obvious.

Referring to the dubious practices of the Commission regarding group houses in Queensland, the PAC made comments applicable to the whole scheme:

> *The attempt to compel a soldier to accept a house…although unsuitable to him by reason of its price or situation, is to be deprecated. When in addition to this, the soldier is informed that, if he does not take the house offered to him, he will have to go without, it appears that the intentions of the Act are being deliberately and improperly put aside.*
>
> *It is quite reasonable that applicants should be supplied with sketch plans of the standardized dwellings in order that they might have an opportunity of studying them before making a selection. The absence of complaints concerning the homes built by the Commonwealth Bank was, it is considered, mainly due to the personal interest taken in each applicant and the desire, so far as practicable, to meet individual tastes in the planning and design of the homes. The personal touch, so essential to the success of an undertaking of this character, appears to have been somewhat lacking from the transactions of the Commission.*[42]

The most basic reasons for the unwillingness to purchase were that the houses were too expensive and poorly located. More than any other problem, it was the inability of the Commission to provide houses that veterans wanted to live in and could afford that truly marked the War Service Homes scheme as a tragic failure. With over 200 houses still 'unallotted' (ie unsold) around Australia in August 1923, the PAC concurred with suggestions that these should be sold, preferably to veterans, but sold at all costs. That homes built at such cost could be sold to non-veterans underlines the poor planning of the scheme. As the PAC put it:

> *As interest has to be paid on the capital cost of unallotted houses, the action taken to dispose of such houses commends itself to the Committee. With the present house shortage in Australia, the fact that the Commission has so many of these houses on hand, is a grave reflection on the judgement of those responsible for their erection.*[43]

'Chaste homes in dainty arboreal settings'

From November 1921 onwards much of the administration of the War Service Homes Act was turned over to the States. Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania all took on the work of providing houses. The NSW and Queensland governments steadfastly refused to have anything to do with the scheme and the branches in those states continued as before.[44] The successful 'Thousand Homes Scheme' in Adelaide was funded out of War Service Homes money. As well as housing veterans this scheme was aimed at relocating slum-dwellers from Adelaide's core. Despite some problems, the initiative was fairly successful and 'Colonel Light Gardens' probably represents the best of the Australian town planning schemes of the inter-war years. Applicants were given a choice of building blocks and house designs, and care was taken so that identical houses were not built adjacent to each other. This combined with good transport, via tram, a location close to Adelaide's centre and reasonable amenities, made the War Service

Homes Commission's efforts look amateurish and half-hearted by comparison. *Building* magazine saw it as a bulwark against 'the rising tide menace [sic] of communism.'[45]

In December 1921 the Hon. Hector Lamond became Assistant Minister for Repatriation, taking over responsibility for the War Service Homes Commission. The applications on hand were prioritized and the Commission began authorizing building work again. All building work was done by contract; day labour supervised by the Commission was not used again.[46] Veterans were lent money to build a house of their choice. Thus rather than acting as a paternalistic developer, the Commission acted as bank and designer for its clients. These arrangements may have suited the Australian temperament better, giving some freedom of choice, though choices were obviously constrained by finances.

According to Commissioner H.L. Walters writing in 1928:

> *The Commission has available quite a number of plans which have been prepared for other applicants, but it is interesting that to note that the majority of those seeking the Commission's aid in the erection of a home have decided views and would much rather commence with a new design than convert an existing one to their ideas.*[47]

This was very reasonable and shows the 'personal touch' that the PAC found so lacking in the Commission's earlier dealings with veterans.

Perhaps the most crucial difference in the way the Commission operated after the hiatus was the way groups of houses were built. Instead of building in anticipation of demand, estates were 'opened for selection by Returned Soldier Applicants…under the War Service Homes Act' and houses were only commenced when approval was granted. The Royal Park Estate in Chatswood and the Hemsley Estate in Roseville were developed from 1924 onwards on this system.[48] Both of these estates featured the curves, irregular allotments and pocket reserves decried by the PAC as wasteful and useless. By this time J.J.C. Morrell was Deputy Commissioner in NSW and given his previous record in designing subdivisions, he is likely to have been responsible for the design.

It is clear that the War Service Homes Commission was moving rapidly upmarket. Most of the houses illustrated in a 1928 pattern book issued by the NSW branch were built on the North Shore, particularly in the Lane Cove area.[49] The Commission subdivision, built from 1924 onward at Lightcliff Avenue in Lindfield, was a typical example. One house was described in *Building* as a 'chaste home in (a) dainty arboreal setting' and that it 'would seem to stand in mute protest against critiques on the War Service Homes Department, which is doing its utmost to provide returned soldiers and dependents with the amenities of home life.'[50] This is in stark contrast to their comments 3 years earlier when they argued that the Commission should have been closed down. Part of the reason was that James Morrell worked hard at improving the image of the Commission in NSW.

In November 1924 Morrell delivered a paper on the work of the Commission in NSW which was reprinted in both *Building* and *Architecture*.[51] Perhaps as a brother architect (and an FRIBA at that) he had tamed the savage beast at *Building*, or possibly the Commission was no longer seen as a threat to private architects. By 1928 John L. Berry could write, in Sydney's upmarket lifestyle magazine *The Home*, without any apparent sarcasm, that the Commission 'has administered its department well and given to its applicants efficient material service.' His only criticisms related to the designs of the houses with their 'lack of restraint and striving for effect…[and a] tendency to break up the walls and roof surfaces'. Unsurprisingly the Georgian Revival designs, a style pioneered in Sydney by Berry's firm of Wilson Neave and Berry, drew the strongest praise.[52]

The Commission continued on a reduced scale, but by 1930 had still provided over 40,000 houses.[53] The £50,000,000 envisaged was never spent, around £30,000,000 being the total to 1930. Much of the administration of the scheme was handled by the States and staff numbers dropped from 600 in 1921 to 184 in 1929.[54] With the onset of the Depression the number of houses provided crashed. In no year between 1930 and the end of WWII were more than 30 houses built under the Act. This was not surprising considering that applicants had to be able to prove ability to repay loans to build the houses. Capital spent likewise declined.[55]

Conclusion

It is an obvious conclusion that the War Service Homes Scheme was a failure. The reasons for that failure included hasty preparation, poor choice of staff, poor planning, lack of supervision, lack of accountability, changes of government policy and a reluctance to let diggers decide what sort of houses they would like to live in.

The half-finished estates dotted around Sydney stand as a mute testimonial to the folly of the War Service Homes Commission. Unfinished streets of Commission houses are interspersed with post-WWII houses built by the NSW Housing Commission. Parramatta and Bankstown hospitals are built on land purchased for the housing of

veterans. The only signs of the location of some estates are streets with names like Jellicoe, Gallipoli and Mons Streets. Eighty years on some of these areas are still lightly settled, (for example the E.N. Rowley Estate in Bankstown) an indication of how poorly located they were.

The scheme did not end up being 'applicable to ordinary wage-earners'. What had begun, at least partly, as an attempt to reward the sacrifice of Australian troops of WWI ended up as a subsidy to middle-class housing on the North Shore. Rental housing remained the only real option for many of the 'ordinary wage-earners' who were originally meant to benefit from the Commission's work.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the whole fiasco is in the intangible area of government policy. The War Service Homes Commission was the first, and only, attempt at a national housing scheme. Government housing has since been left to the States, with little involvement of the Federal government. Had the Commission been a resounding success this may well have been different. It can therefore be suggested that the failure of the Commission to fulfil government and community expectations has had an influence far beyond the few houses it managed to build.

References

1 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.10
2 *Building* Sydney November 1919, p.57
3 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, p.9118
4 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.iv
5 Lloyd, Clem & Rees, Jacqui *The Last Shilling a history of repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994, p.44
6 Bell, Peter *Timber and Iron, houses in North Queensland Mining Settlements, 1861-1920* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984, p.27
7 Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol ?, p.360
8 *Building* Sydney March 1919, p.44
9 Bean C.E.W. *The Australian Imperial Force in France* Vol III of The Official History of Australia in WWI, 12th Edition, Angus and Robertson Sydney 1941, p.666
10 Doneley, Bob *Black over blue : the 25th Battalion, AIF at war, 1915-1918* Darling Heights, Qld USQ Press, 1997, p.80
11 Taylor, *Kenneth Australian Housing Policy and Programmes up to the Second World War - with special reference to Federal housing administration* M.Ec Thesis Sydney University 1961, p.60-65
12 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.iii
13 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.1
14 *Sydney Morning Herald* 22nd July 1919, p.8
15 Taylor, Kenneth *Australian Housing Policy and Programmes up to the Second World War - with special reference to Federal housing administration* M.Ec Thesis Sydney University 1961, p.62-63
16 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.5
17 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.11
18 Freestone, Robert *Model communities, the garden city movement in Australia* Thomas Nelson Melbourne, 1989, p.63 & p.156-157
19 Taylor, Kenneth *Australian Housing Policy and Programmes up to the Second World War - with special reference to Federal housing administration* M.Ec Thesis Sydney University 1961, p.62
20 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.11
21 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.15
22 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.vi
23 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.viii
24 Freestone, Robert *Model communities, the garden city movement in Australia* Thomas Nelson Melbourne, 1989, p.74
25 *Australasian Concrete* November 15th, 1921, p.8
26 Estates mainly from map SP205/5 Australian Archives.
27 *Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (New South Wales)* Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1921, p.vii
28 *Building* Sydney June 1920, p.77
29 *Building* Sydney August 1920, p.60
30 Australian Housing Corporation *Defence Service Homes Scheme, its nature, history and operations*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p.6
31 Smiths Weekly 1921, quoted on p. 153 'Homes for heroes' in Lloyd, Clem & Rees, Jacqui *The Last Shilling a history of repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994.

32 *Interim Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the Purchase of Saw-Mills and Timber Areas in Queensland*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.8
33 Smiths Weekly 1920, quoted on p. 153 'Homes for heroes' in Lloyd, Clem & Rees, Jacqui *The Last Shilling a history of repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994.
34 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, November 1920, p.8
35 *War Service Homes Commissioner: Statement by the acting Minister for Repatriation (The Hon. A.S. Rogers) of reasons for declaring appointment of Lieut.-Colonel James Walker to be null and void*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, April 1921, p.1
36 1921 Drainage map for Walker/Launcelot Street from the Strathfield Council Local History Collection
37 Freeman, Peter (ed) *The Early Canberra House, Living in Canberra 1911-1933*, Federal Capital Federal Press, ACT, 1996, p.48
38 *Building* Sydney June 1921, p.60
39 *Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Disposals*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, August 1923, p.3-13
40 *Final Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, July 1922, p.9
41 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 2/12/1921, p.13579
42 'War Service Homes "The Open Air" Aspect' *Building* Sydney January 1920, p.80
43 *Fourth Progress Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Commission (Queensland)*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, December 1921, p.8
44 *Report from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts upon the War Service Homes Disposals*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, August 1923, p.13
45 Australian Housing Corporation *Defence Service Homes Scheme, its nature, history and operations*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p.8
46 *Building* Sydney November 1925, p.157
47 *War Service Homes Act - Report of the War Service Homes Commission, together with statements and balance sheets, 1st July 1921, to 30th June 1922*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, October 1922, p.6
48 Walters H.L. 'War Service Homes Commission, architectural features and ideals' in Cattell, Homer J. (ed) *Distinctive Australian Homes* Progress Publications Sydney 1928, p.70
49 Letter to Willoughby Council from War Service Homes Commission 11/11/1924, from Willoughby City Library Local History Collection. Housing and Land - Policies re building in brick.
50 War Service Homes Commission, New South Wales *Branch Designs of Homes for selection by applicants*, issued January 1928.
51 *Building* Sydney November 1925, p.1
52 *Architecture* Sydney January 1925, pp.11-15
53 Berry, John L. 'War Service Homes' *The Home* April 1928, p.28
54 Australian Housing Corporation *Defence Service Homes Scheme, its nature, history and operations*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p.59
55 Taylor, Kenneth *Australian Housing Policy and Programmes up to the Second World War - with special reference to Federal housing administration* M.Ec Thesis Sydney University 1961, p.91
56 Australian Housing Corporation *Defence Service Homes Scheme, its nature, history and operations*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p.59

John Johnson is local studies librarian at Liverpool City Library. John has an MA in Applied History from UTS. He is currently a member of the Historic Buildings Committee of the NSW National Trust and Vice-President of the Burwood and District Historical Society.

Sutherland Shire: Shaped by History

Maryanne Larkin

Sutherland Shire, on the southern edge of Sydney, has claims to national significance. It includes the site of Captain James Cook's first landfall in Australia in 1770, Australia's first national park and significant sites of Aboriginal occupation. It is now home to more than 200,000 people, making it the second most populous municipality in Sydney. Local residents usually refer to it with affection as simply 'the Shire'.

Sutherland Shire is characterised by a high percentage of residents born in Australia and a high percentage of people of English ancestry. There are pockets of high and low income, but overall living standards might be described as comfortable. Voting tends to favour non-Labor candidates and social attitudes tend to be conservative. Residents have a strong sense of local identity, of belonging to 'the Shire'. When the state government proposed to delete the term 'shire' from municipal titles in 1993, residents deluged the Minister for Local Government with appeals for its retention. The Minister was so surprised by the strength of feeling that he agreed.

Many of the features which characterise the Shire today were established early in its history. Planned development of a large area on a leasehold basis and control by one land company established a town and suburban subdivision pattern whose basic shape is still apparent today. Before World War II the Shire developed a socially homogeneous society, with a majority of residents sharing similar cultural backgrounds, social values and political views. Many of these characteristics are still evident despite the extraordinary increase in population since the War

Factors which strongly influenced the Shire's development include its attractive geographical setting and the effects of external social, economic and political forces. The Shire's clearly defined boundaries, bordered by waterways and national parks, assisted in the development of a relatively independent identity. Its desirable geographical features, especially the beach at Cronulla, were important in attracting large numbers of tourists. Tourists had a significant impact by increasing the Shire's population, affecting the local economy, lobbying for better transport and influencing local politics.

External pressures upon the area included the policies of political parties, the needs of the city for urban expansion and recreation, and the voting power of non-residents. State governments in particular were, and still are, in a strong position to grant or withhold from local communities facilities like schools and roads. Major social and economic events in the past were perhaps of overriding importance. The depressions of the 1890s and 1930s brought

large numbers of people to settle in the Shire. The passion for surf bathing which first gripped Sydneysiders in the early 1900s altered the planned pattern of settlement, increased the local population, shifted political and economic power to the eastern end of the Shire and created tensions between existing residents and new arrivals.

The foundations for the Shire's present social composition can be found in the 1880s among the residents of the new suburbs along Sydney's inner western train line. If we look at a photograph of a typical family of the time in the back garden of their home in Petersham, we see a couple in their thirties with their young children and the children's grandfather. They came to Australia from England about five years ago. The young printer's business is going well and they have settled into a comfortable home and attend church on Sunday. They look at the camera confidently, unaware that financial hardship is only a few short years away.

Figure 1: Photograph of family group, 1880s (Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

When the boom economy of the early 1880s falls away in the later years of the decade the demand for printing drops. By the early 1890s a severe depression has set in. The printer has lost his business and is struggling to keep his home. He faces the prospect of working for the council to pay off his rate arrears. The loss of not only his livelihood, but also his independence, is hard to bear.

One evening the family sees an advertisement in the newspaper. It claims that 'any industrious man, with the very smallest means, may make a Home, and in a short time become independent' by taking up farming land on the Holt-Sutherland Estate. They arrange to meet James Murphy, the estate manager, at Sutherland station and are driven out towards Miranda for an inspection. People seem to be doing well on the small farms which they visit. They don't know much about farming, but Mr. Murphy assures them that he will help them to get started. They select five acres near a small creek.

In moving out to start a new life the family is joining similar families who are relocating to the area at the same time; and they are starting a long term trend. Those moving to the area are generally British (mostly English) people with young families who belong to a Protestant church, have some business or trade skills and come from the suburbs rather than the inner city. Mostly they are from new suburbs such as Stanmore, Petersham and Summer Hill. These new homeowners were especially hard hit by the depression, and they were particularly targeted by the advertising of the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company.

In the early twentieth century the area attracted more residents of like background, some of whom were immigrants direct from England joining relatives and friends. Statistics from the census in 1921 and again in 1933 show these trends very clearly. The population was very British, Protestant and reasonably skilled. Some people were clearly missing — there were very low numbers of Catholics (only half the state average) and very few people from the inner city. These trends have largely continued to the present. There have been changes (the percentage of Catholics has now risen to the state average), but few compared with other areas of Sydney. The rather conservative attitudes of early settlers continue to be reflected in community surveys recently prepared for Sutherland Shire Council.

Some of the present shape of the Shire, especially the Sutherland-Cronulla peninsula, is a result of planning by the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company. In 1881 the Company leased 12,000 acres from Thomas Holt and set about developing it on a leasehold basis, sub-letting to tenants for ninety-nine years. Soon after it commenced operations the Company subdivided 1,000 acres into three areas - the Townlet of Sylvania (a riverside 'model suburb'), the Township of Sutherland (business and residential) and the Suburban Areas (acreage blocks for more substantial

Figure 2: Subdivision of the Township of Sutherland in 1882 into 1/3 acre blocks, with main roads 2 chains wide. (SF S18/5, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

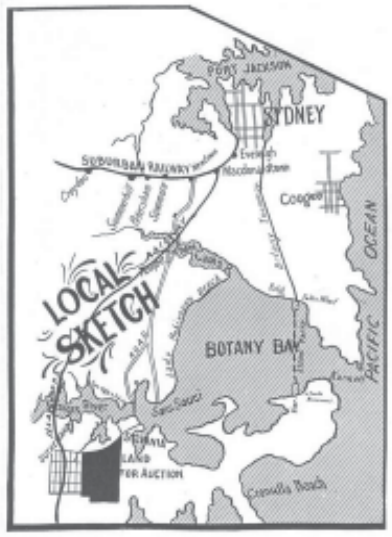


Figure 3: Map showing the inner western suburbs of Sydney from which Sutherland Shire residents were drawn. From an advertisement for the Holt-Sutherland Estate Five Acre Blocks subdivision, 1881. (SP S18/1 3, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

houses and gardens). The development aimed at a high standard, incorporating some of the features of the early model suburbs: wide streets, large blocks, designated major and minor roads, and an absence of rear laneways.

The initial planning of the estate aimed to meet the demands of the land boom in the ISBOs. However, the opportunity to sell land for subsistence farming during the depression led the Company to open up areas outside its existing subdivisions, especially in Miranda and Highfield (now Caringbah). Much of the early development was directed by James Murphy, the Company's manager and major shareholder.

The long term results of the Company's planning were both positive and negative. The initial pattern of wide streets and large lots has mostly persisted to the present. Development control by one company also gave the area a cohesion which united otherwise scattered settlements. The major negative effect of the Company's control is the lack of public reserves, especially along the waterfronts. The Company fought hard to retain control over its land, opposing several attempts by the council to create public reserves. Today, while the Shire appears to have adequate open space, most of this is in surrounding national parks rather than within residential areas.

Sutherland Shire Council was established in 1906 and gradually took over control of local development, after several tussles with the Holt-Sutherland Company which retained an interest in the land until the 1950s. In 1908 the council and the Company combined their efforts to make sure the new tramway to Cronulla passed through Sutherland, rather than connecting Cronulla with the city in a more direct route. This action tied the shire together on an east-west axis, made it more difficult for Cronulla to break away to form a separate municipality and ensured that the area as a whole benefited from the growing popularity of Cronulla.

Policy decisions made by the early councillors also strongly influenced the area's subsequent development. The council resolved to encourage tourism as the major local industry, and to oppose the establishment of noxious trades. One of the ways the council sought to cope with the resulting influx of tourists was to enforce codes of behaviour on Cronulla beach. By 1915 a council ranger patrolled Cronulla to ensure that bathers adhered to a council determined standard of dress and behaviour. The approved attire for bathers when they were not actually in the water comprised kimonos for women and baggy shorts for men. These could be hired from council dressing sheds. The dress code was the strictest in Sydney, and by the end of the twenties it attracted derision in Sydney newspapers, one of which berated a 'pettifogging bureaucracy' which imposed 'verbotens and grandmotherly laws'. However the council's stance was strongly supported by a community striving to protect its conservative values against what one resident called 'the Surry Hills type of people'. Only when the tourist industry was threatened by a drop in visitors during the 1930s depression, did the council and residents agree to relax the rules.

Tourism was an important element in shaping the Shire. As is the case in many tourist destinations, many of the people who visited decided to stay. This gave the Shire one of the fastest growing population rates in Sydney and settlements like Cronulla grew very rapidly. Other visitors bought weekenders and, as non-resident ratepayers, were

Figure 4: After the opening of the tramway to Cronulla in 1911, land prices near Cronulla reached record levels. According to this advertisement for land at present day Caringbah and Woolooware, Cronulla was 'select' and 'fashionable'. *(Rickard's Realty Review,* Oct. 1912, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

able to influence local politics. In 1922 the percentage of non-resident ratepayers reached a peak of 83%. Non-residents tended to support developments which improved their property values while opposing the provision of local services which cost them money. These differing priorities led to some friction with permanent residents.

State and federal governments also played a part in shaping the Shire. In the 1920s the electrification of the rail line to Sutherland encouraged the growth of settlements along the line, while the long wait for a reliable water supply slowed down the permanent settlement of Cronulla. Successive governments were slow to provide services. When lobbying for a much-needed bridge across the Georges River failed, the council funded the construction itself. Although residents complained about the necessity for this, a reputation for sturdy independence accorded well with their image of themselves. In 1930 one councillor voiced the widely held local opinion that 'Sutherland Shire was notorious for helping itself.

Some of these dynamics were not only features of the Shire in the past, but are still relevant today. Present day residents dissatisfied with government pressure to impose high rise buildings and increase population densities ask themselves the same question that their forebears did: to what extent can local communities maintain their own identity in the face of strong pressures from external forces?

References

Mark D'Arney, *New South Wales election 1999: electorate profiles.* Sydney, NSW Parliamentary Library, 1999

Maryanne Larkin, *Sutherland Shire: a Histoty to 1939,* Sutherland History Press, 1998

The People of New South Wales: Statistics from the 1996 Census, Sydney,

Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW, 1998

Shape the Shire, Sutherland Shire Council and Hunter Valley Research Foundation, 1997-1998

Dr Maryanne Larkin is Senior Manuscripts Librarian at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. She is the author of *Sutherland Shire: a History to 1939* (pub. 1998), which is based on her PhD thesis. She has lived in Sutherland Shire for over twenty five years.

Endnote

Conference Organisers

The Suburbia Conference was organised by the Conservation Department & staff of the National Trust of Australia (NSW)

Jane Ainsworth, Bushland Assistant
Mara Barnes, Executive Assistant to the Conservation Director
Julie Blyth, Archivist
Janice Cave, Conservation Officer
Cara Crosswhite, Conservation Officer
Helen Dowd, Volunteer
Jacqui Goddard, Conservation Director
Wendy Griffith, Volunteer
John Hennigar, General Hand
Simon Ip, Volunteer
David McEvoy, IT
Bob McFarlane, Caretaker
Graham Quint, Deputy Conservation Director + IT Manager
Jenny Quint, NT web site
Marlene Strecker, Classifications Officer
Tim Swan, Volunteer
Jeff Thompson, Cemeteries Officer
Beryl Winter, Volunteer

Catering

Margaret Ramard, National Trust Cafe

Suburban Tours

were carried out with the assistance of:

Fairfield

Paul Graham, Cultural Planner Fairfield City Council, Tour Leader
Venerable Phoc Son, Phuoc Hue Buddhist Monastery
Venerable Phoc Hung, Phuoc Hue Buddhist Monastery
Isaac Kismo, Volunteer Bus Driver
Laurie Sheehan, Volunteer Bus Driver

Canterbury

Dr Lesley Muir, Tour Leader
Brian Madden, Tour Leader

Ryde

Sue Weatherley, Group Manager, Environmental Planning, Ryde City Council
Tracey Maloney, Environmental Planning, Ryde City Council
Jennifer Hill, Architect, Tour Leader
Jennifer Noble
Bev McClymont

North Sydney

Eden Shepherd, Strategic Planner, North Sydney Council, Tour Leader