

THE AREA OF CASTLECRAG

The first Crown leases were made available in 1860 but little development occurred until the early 1900s. By 1920 several areas had been subdivided but access was still poor and most houses were of timber and for holiday use. There were however boatsheds, a public wharf and some Chinese market gardens.

In 1920 Walter Burley Griffin – the American architect who had won the competition to design Canberra – formed the Greater Sydney Development Association Ltd, which bought 90 acres on the south side of the scarp. Griffin called this 'Castlecrag Estate'. Eventually the whole peninsular came to be called Castlecrag.

Griffin's designs were unconventional – 'no red roofs – I want Castlecrag built so that each individual can feel the whole of the landscape is his'. This caused problems with banks, builders and Council. In the 20s and 30s development was steady but slow and came almost to a standstill because of the Great Depression when land values fell dramatically. In 1937 Griffin died but his work was carried on by his partner Eric Nicholls until the early 1940s.

At the same time development on the northern side was taking place in a more conventional style. In the 1950s and 60s building boomed. Griffin's vision had made Castlecrag a very desirable area, impressive houses, some by innovative architects, were erected. However as the Griffin 'covenant' no longer applied, development became a matter of personal taste. Today the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful are cheek-by-jowl and make at least for an interesting walk – if perhaps it would be a great disappointment to Walter Burley Griffin.

THE WALK commences in Edinburgh Road opposite Charles Street. Street parking is readily available. There are two Sydney Buses that run from Chatswood Station to Castlecrag, the 267 which runs past the corner of Eastern Valley Way and Edinburgh Road, and the 275 which runs down Edinburgh Road. Phone 131500 for timetables and routes. The walk takes approximately one and a half to two hours. The section No.20 to No.23 is listed as optional and would take approximately an extra twenty minutes.

1. G.S.D.A. NO. 1 DWELLING

136 Edinburgh Road. Built in stone in 1921 as a demonstration house for the Greater Sydney Development Association (G.S.D.A.), it was sold only in 1942. From 1947 to 1992 it had only one owner. In 1951 the block between No.136 and No.140 was purchased and split between the two houses. Purchased in 1993 and restored by the Historic Houses Trust it was resold with a permanent protective covenant. The land has been subdivided and a new sympathetic residence, designed by Bruce Rickard, built and auctioned in 1995.

2. G.S.D.A. NO.2 DWELLING

140 Edinburgh Road. A Griffin house built in 1921. A typical fortress of a rough sandstone appearance. Minor alterations include enclosure of the original porch.

3. THE JOHNSON HOUSE

4 The Parapet. Built in 1922 by Griffin for Mrs. Elliot Johnson it is the only house of his in Castlecrag with a pitched tiled roof in the original design.

4. THE GRANT HOUSE

8 The Parapet. Another Griffin house. Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahoney lived here from 1924 to 1931. The original roof leaked and has been replaced. As with most of the Griffin houses the drain pipes were originally taken down through cupboards on the inside of the house and were not a great success. Many of the Griffin houses had these practical problems which made them difficult to live with and were the cause of much alteration and additions.

5. THE MERCER HOUSE

10 The Parapet. Built in 1940 by Eric Nicholls who was an earlier associate of Griffin and later Willoughby Council's honorary Town Planner. Second storey added in 1950. Many examples of Nicholls' work survive in the area, including Castlecrag Community Hall and Glenaeon School in Middle Cove.

6. THE MOON HOUSE

12 The Parapet. c.1922. A Griffin house, it was extensively altered and added to by Eric Nicholls who lived in it for some time. Later additions include an extended second storey.

7. THE CHEONG HOUSE

14 The Parapet. A Griffin house. Built in 1924 for CKCheong a director of the G.S.D.A. Laundry and garage added.

8. GLENAEON

(FORMERLY CASTLECRAG INFANTS SCHOOL)

117 Edinburgh Road. Castlecrag Infants School opened in 1950 with the motto 'together we grow'. It closed in 1989. In 1994 Glenaeon became the owner of the property and it is now an infants and primary branch of the Rudolf Steiner school.

9. RIVETT HOUSE

148 Edinburgh Road. Built for Dr. E. Rivett, the founder of Cabarisha Hospital. The Griffin plan originally had a flat roof. Dr.Rivett wanted a pitched roof – he fought a court battle against the G.S.D.A. and won.

10. GRIFFIN MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

Corner of Edinburgh Rd./Sortie Port. Erected during Willoughby Council's centenary year in 1965. Commissioned by the Castlecrag Community Centre Committee it was designed by Bim Hilder, local artist and designer, who had worked with Griffin. Local residents subscribed to its construction. Another memorial to Griffin are the trees planted along Edinburgh Road by the Castlecrag Progress Association when they heard of Griffin's death in India in 1937.

11. CASTLECRAG HOSPITAL

150 Edinburgh Road. Castlecrag Private Hospital on the corner of Sortie Port was formerly called Cabarisha Hospital after an American Indian healer. The original stone cottage was built for King O'Malley by Griffin in 1923. King O'Malley was a member of the first Federal Parliament in 1901. He moved a motion that secured the land for the Federal Capital Territory, and later called for designs for Canberra. The house was bought by Dr. Edward Rivett and became a hospital in 1928. The building has had numerous extensions including some by Eric Nicholls but retains much of the Griffin character.

12. 141 EDINBURGH ROAD

Extensive mock Tudor mansion built in 1935 for Dr. Rivett, son of the founder of Castlecrag Hospital.

13. 156 EDINBURGH ROAD

An Eric Nicholls house built in 1946 as a single storey and the second storey added in 1950.

14. THE FELSTEAD HOUSE

158 Edinburgh Road. 'Atrium Villa' 1923 – 24. This was Griffin's first house in Sydney built of knitlock (a machine made concrete block developed by Griffin). Originally an open court in the centre of the house contained a fountain. It was enclosed later. Well restored, with original detail.

15. 170 EDINBURGH ROAD

Built in 1938 by Eric Nicholls for Edgar Deans who was Mayor of Willoughby in 1953-54 and a pillar of the Castlecrag Progress Association. It has been extensively altered.

16. ST JAMES CHURCH OF ENGLAND

184 – 186 Edinburgh Road. A small hall was built on this site in 1954 and four years later a second storey was added to make the church. Another hall was added at the rear of the site in 1969. A mural in the foyer is by Bim Hilder.

17. MILLS LOOKOUT

North side of Edinburgh Road opposite the church. This is a community bush regeneration site supported by Council's Bushcare programme.

On the same side of the street as you walk on, next to the Lookout, is No.173, a most unusual new house, and next to that, at No.177, a sandstone house designed by Bim Hilder c.1937. Nos.183 and 185 have utilised a natural outcropping of sandstone to form a front fence.

18. 98 EDINBURGH ROAD

An interesting recent house by Philip Cox, Richardson, Taylor and Partners. Philip Cox is one of the most admired current Australian architects.

19. TOWER RESERVE

Griffin's Castlecrag plan provided numerous reserves. These were communal bushland recreation areas and also served as shortcuts between streets. Tower Reserve is a good example of one of the few remaining accessible to the general public.

NOTE: Numbers 20 to 23 are not included in the timing (approx.20 minutes extra). There are many interesting looking houses in this stretch some of which are:-

20. THE MORIARTY HOUSE

215 Edinburgh Road. Another example of Eric Nicholls' work from 1941. Pergola added in 1946.

21. 223 EDINBURGH ROAD

'Bayview' an interesting timber house c.1910. Site of an early community kindergarten run for many years by the Stokers.

21A. STOKER PLAYGROUND

A pleasant children's play area with views of the water. Named after Phyl and Michael Stoker, neighbours and past residents of Castlecrag, to recognise their contribution to the care and welfare of children.

22. 265-267 EDINBURGH ROAD

Designed by Peter Muller for R.B.Audette in 1953. It was Muller's first commission. Still a most spectacular looking building, it has elements of both Frank Lloyd Wright and traditional Japanese architecture.

23. 39 LINDEN WAY

Built in 1981 by Alex Popov (Wilkinson Award winner 1990). A house typical of a break with traditional style in the last decade. Many of these homes – some quite spectacular – are on battleaxe blocks using some of the remaining available land, but are not visible from the street

Here ends the optional walk

24. THE FISHWICK HOUSE

15 The Citadel. Largest of the Griffin homes, and now beautifully restored. Generally as designed except for minor changes. New adjacent driveway has altered the house's relationship to the rock form. Skylights in the living room were originally fish ponds. They were removed not because they leaked (as rumoured) but because of the cleaning they required.

From here take the walkway between No. 17 and No. 19 The Citadel. This leads down steps and through bushland and around to the left past the backs of houses eventually coming out next to No.2 The Bantagan. This house was built by Bim Hilder in 1947. Turn left into The Bulwark, and on your right you will find:

25. 42 THE BULWARK

Built by Eric Nicholls in 1949 for Dr. Hedberg. Now turn around and go back down The Bulwark – turn left into The Scarp.

26. THE HAVEN THEATRE

Corner of The Scarp and The Barricade. It was planned and constructed by the Griffins in a natural amphitheatre. It was part of a plan for cultural community activities. Car headlights and magnesium flares provided the original lighting. The wooden stage and lighting are later additions. During and after the Second World War the theatre fell into disuse but is now once more in regular use.

The walk now takes us back to The Bulwark – turn left

27. THE GLASSHOUSE

80 The Bulwark. 'The Glasshouse', as it is known, was built by architect Bill Lucas for himself and his wife Ruth in 1957. The beginnings of the natural, minimalist approach can be seen in this simple and graceful building. Walk the length of The Bulwark to Rockley Street. Look around you at the many diverse and entertaining house styles. The precedent established by the Griffin era and the atmosphere created of innovation has allowed much interesting building in the area – some good, some awful – but all interesting.

Turn left into Rockley Street which is the second oldest road in Castlecrag appearing by name on an 1887 survey map.

28. ROCKLEY STREET LOOKOUT

At the end of Rockley Street. Overlooking Sailor's Bay Park – a bush regeneration area. A pleasant spot to sit and take in the views over Sailor's Bay. There is a memorial plaque to Leonard Teale, the actor, who lived in Castlecrag. A rough track leads down to the shoreline and Castlecrag Boatshed (not included in timing of walk).

Return to the end of Rockley Street and to your left is The Barbette

29. 'LONG GRIFFIN'

2 The Barbette. 1929-1930. Known as Long Griffin because of its linear plan. Built for Roy Wilson who was a salesman with the G.S.D.A., it was, unusually, designed with a garage. The loggia linking garage to house has been enclosed. The windows are flanked by stepped concrete prisms. Concerts and play readings were held in the living room.

30. CRESWICK HOUSE

4 The Barbette. 1926. Named by the Griffins the 'House of the Seven Lanterns', it was a knitlock house with corner buttresses. It had its distinctive lanterns formed by structural segments of knitlock perched on the parapet. These have since been removed. It was built for Mrs.A.E.Creswick, but the first registered owners appear to have been the Griffins. The house has since been spraycreted and a new roof was laid over the original flat roof, which leaked.

31. THE DUNCAN HOUSE

8 The Barbette. 1934. The smallest (7m.x7m.) Griffin house which until 1988 had only one owner. Built of stone and knitlock it was the last Griffin house built in Castlecrag. The original house still exists behind a front addition.

32. 7 THE BARBETTE

At the very end of The Barbette in a cul-de-sac is a charming Eric Nicholls' house. Built in 1948 for the Collings-Powers.

33. 'CAMELOT'

3 The Bastion. An Eric Nicholls house completed in 1939 for Guido Barrachi and the writer Betty Roland, who lived for some time in the 'House of Seven Lanterns' while it was being built. A large circular room in the house became a small theatre which they called 'Pangloss' where they held performances of plays, Louise Lightfoot's dancing class, a British Drama League seminar and various talks. All this ended in 1941 with the entry of Japan into the war.

34. THE GUY HOUSE

23 The Bastion. Built for Robert Guy, a commercial artist, and his wife Beth in 1925, it was called by Marion Griffin 'Temple of Aphrodite'. A stone garage designed by the Griffin office was added at the front in 1927. The upper storey is a 1963 addition.

35. THE MOWER HOUSE

12 The Rampart. Built c.1926. A replacement roof and considerable alterations have been made.

36. THE NURSES QUARTERS

No.6 The Battlement. Originally in the grounds of Castlecrag Hospital, it was built by Eric Nicholls in the late 30s as a nurses home.

From here if you walk up Sortie Port you will find yourself once more in Edinburgh Road close to your starting point.

FURTHER READING

- 'The Suburb of Castlecrag' compiled by Esther Leslie 994.411 Wil
'The Devious Being' by Betty Roland 921 Rol
'Building for nature, Walter Burley Griffin and Castlecrag' Walker et al. 994.411 Wal
'Beyond Architecture' video 720.994 GRI

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CASTLECRAG WALK

