

# Castlecrag Timeline

1920-1939

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1920 Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA) was formed in November to develop the Castlecrag Estate, an area of 94 acres, with Walter Burley Griffin as Managing Director. The GSDA had a diverse collection of shareholders, including five Federal politicians and several prominent leaders of Melbourne's Chinese community, who were supportive of the Griffins and their ideals. Griffin is credited with the selection of the name 'Castlecrag'. The rocks in Tower Reserve reminded him of 'Castle Rock' on which Edinburgh Castle stands.

1920 The Sailors Bay subdivision of Torquay Estate was subdivided. It was located to the east of what was to later become the Haven Estate of the GSDA.

1921 Griffin submitted his first subdivision plan to Willoughby Municipal Council on 9 March, stating that it is intended 'to make this subdivision a model residential area for those appreciating the unique advantage of Sydney's headlands.' Willoughby Council's approval of Griffin's radical subdivision plan marks the beginning of community support for his ideal of a bushland suburb.

1921 The GSDA completed the purchase of 650 acres (263 ha) of harbourfront land at Castlecrag, Covecrag (Middle Cove) and Castlecove in May.

1921



Today's streetscape in The Parapet provides one of the best examples of Griffin's vision for Castlecrag

The first GSDA land sale was held at The Parapet, Castlecrag on 26 November, with public proclamation of fifteen 'Special Conditions' or protective covenants. Two demonstration homes designed by Griffin – GSDA No.1 and GSDA No.2 were completed by local contractors in time for the auction. GSDA No.1 house was used as the company's design office, while Marion Griffin lived in the No.2 house when she first moved to Castlecrag during 1924 to organise an active sales campaign. The GSDA sold the No.1 house in 1943, while the No.2 residence was used by company staff during the 1930s. It was sold in 1951.

1921 A stone week-end cottage was erected on the Castlecrag escarpment by Dr Robert Mackay, the medical superintendent of Lidcombe hospital. The sandstone used for building was quarried locally. His daughter-in-law, Nancy Fleming, had moved to Castlecrag in 1951 and in the 1970s, she renovated the cottage with the assistance of architect Barry Kerr.

1922 The first two streets in the Castlecrag Estate – The Postern and The Parapet – were formed. Four Griffin-designed homes were erected in The Parapet during 1925 for Melbourne owners. Another was built in Rockley Street (now Sortie Port) for King O'Malley the following year. Those in The Parapet comprise the Johnson house (No.4), built as a demonstration house and financed by Sir William Johnson, No.8 financed by the theatrical producer and manager, Julius Grant, No.12 financed by Chin Wah Moon, and No.14 financed by the Reverend Cheok Hong Cheong. All these men were prominent shareholders in the GSDA. This group of 'demonstration houses' were designed individually 'in the round' with somewhat mysterious architectural forms, creating an utterly distinctive streetscape. The staggered setbacks of the houses against the sweep of the contoured road signal Griffin's alternative vision for suburban development at Castlecrag

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- 1922 Griffin wrote his first major article on Castlecrag in the August *Australian Home Builder*. He described the estate as 'an idealistic development' which will 'conserve for the residents all the remarkable natural features of the place – its outlooks, monumental cliffs, caverns, ancient trees, fern glens, wild flower glades, waterfalls and foreshores.' Integral to Griffin's plan was the preservation of the local indigenous flora – disturbance was to be minimal.
- 1923 Radio station 2FC was established by Farmer & Company on the western boundary of Sunnyside Estate on the northern escarpment. It operated at this location until 1929.
- 1923 Edgar Herbert, who had become friendly with the Griffins in Melbourne, brought his family to live in Castlecrag, initially living in the King O'Malley house until 1927. The Herberts then moved to a cottage named *Gareloch* on the waterfront at the eastern end of Edinburgh Road. A pioneer of physical education in Australia, Herbert was an early environmentalist and was actively involved in the open-air theatre productions at the New Scenic Haven Theatre.
- 1924 The syndicate which owned Sunnyside Estate began subdividing and selling land. With the establishment of radio station 2FC, this became known as the Wireless Estate.
- 1924 Griffin's first privately commissioned house, the Felstead House at 158 Edinburgh Road, was constructed for Theophilus Pyrie Felstead, a Melbourne-based businessman. Using knitlock construction, this is a larger and more prestigious house than those previously built by the GSDA. It is an 'atrium villa' with a central court (since enclosed) providing the main circulation space. It was sited with dress circle views over Sailors Bay. Four shops and an estate office designed by Griffin were erected at the entrance to the Castlecrag Estate.
- 1925 Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin moved from Melbourne to Castlecrag in April, residing at the Grant House, 8 The Parapet, until their departure for India in October 1935 and April 1936 respectively.
- 1925 The Castlecrag Progress Association (CPA) was established by the first residents of the estate. Its inaugural meeting was held on 10 November and Edgar Herbert was elected president. Walter and Marion Griffin were active members, with Walter serving on the Executive Committee. Its early campaigns were for a Government infants' school, better transport access to the city by construction of an arterial road from East Lindfield to North Sydney (now Eastern Valley Way), the upgrading of Edinburgh Road, undergrounding of electricity wires, sewage services for the peninsula and tree planting along Edinburgh Road.
- 1925 A Griffin-designed stone house with a large studio-living room was built at 23 The Bastion for Robert Guy, a freelance artist and his wife Elizabeth. It featured a floor plan comprising a series of inter-locking squares and, with its columns defining the squares, it was referred to by Marion Griffin as the 'Temple of Aphrodite'.
- 1926 Walter and Marion Griffin formed a syndicate in May to purchase 30 acres of land adjoining the Castlecrag Estate, which they developed as the Haven Estate, incorporating similar provisions to those of the Castlecrag Estate for landscape conservation. This estate was not sub-divided until the late 1930s.
- 1926 A Griffin-designed *knitlock* house was built for Ellen Mower at 12 The Rampart. It was the first of a group of six houses planned for this street, but the others were never constructed. A two-bedroom *knitlock* house was also constructed at 4 The Barquette for Mrs AE Creswick, the first of three small houses built at the top of the ridge with setbacks staggered to allow views past one another to Middle Harbour. Mrs Creswick was not satisfied with the standard of

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construction of this house and it was purchased by Walter and Marion Griffin in 1929.

- 1927 The *Cabarisha* hospital was established by Dr Edward Rivett, who wanted a non-institutional atmosphere in surroundings where patients could be nursed back to health in an environment of peace and tranquillity. An existing stone house designed by Griffin for his good friend King O'Malley, was initially converted for the project. Later Dr Rivett employed Griffin to design extensions to provide for a 20-bed hospital, which he called *Cabarisha* after a legendary American Indian healer. Over the years many changes have been wrought to the building. It was sold by the Rivett family in 1970 and the name has changed to Castlecrag Private Hospital. Dr Rivett also engaged Griffin to design his residence at 148 Edinburgh Road. A disagreement arose over Griffin's desire a flat roof and the building was not constructed in accordance with his design. The GSDA took action through the courts, with Justice Long-Innis finding in favour of Rivett in a long and complicated judgment.
- 1927 The second Tresillian hospital for nursing mothers, Tresillian North, was opened in Second Avenue Willoughby on 2 March. The Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies, which operated the hospital, received strong support from the Castlecrag community. Marion Griffin and the Management Committee organised a Castlecrag Picnic, which raised £53 for the Society. Margaret Whitlam told the 2002 Australia Day audience at Chatswood of her association with Willoughby through a period at Tresillian North hospital with her first child.
- 1928 In an address to the Theosophical Society entitled *Building for Nature*, Walter Burley Griffin stated, 'The aesthetic requirements are modesty to the extent of subordination of structural features to the striking characteristics of the forested cliffs.'
- 1928 A community tennis court was constructed in Cortile Reserve.
- 1928 Edgar Deans became GSDA secretary, taking over from JH Catts. Edgar and Cappy Deans lived in the GSDA No.2 house at this time. Deans remained as secretary to the GSDA until 1959. He was also president of the CPA for four years and secretary for 13 years. He also served a Secretary of the Willoughby Federated Progress Associations for eight years and as president for two years. He was elected as an alderman to Willoughby Council in 1948, becoming deputy-mayor for two years, then mayor in 1953-54.
- 1928 The GSDA produced a promotional film of the Griffin estates at Castlecrag, entitled *Beautiful Middle Harbour*. This is available on a video from FilmSound Australia, *Keepin' Silent*, which features a selection of classic Australian silent films.
- 1928 The GSDA brochure, *Castlecrag Homes: scenic marine suburb Middle Harbour* states that the reserves and pathways of the Griffin subdivision 'are designed to perpetuate the delightful rambles which were a feature of Castlecrag before its development.'
- 1929 At a meeting with officers and staff at Willoughby Council to discuss the Castlecrag estates, Griffin detailed his design principles for the conservation of "our greatest asset, the pristine beauty of the landscape. It included the following statement on fences: "The ideal objective of the fences at Castlecrag is invisibility, and iron pipe posts with wire net laced to them or spiral rod posts threted (sic) with fence wire to keep out straying animals and protect the growing hedges or thickets with least obtrusiveness. Only stonewalling would be more acceptable than such hedges for enclosures adjacent to the house or street. Nothing would be as satisfactory as natural growth thickets for general screening . . . We have the example of the rest (of the harbourside suburbs) to show that the pitched roof and paling fences have utterly destroyed the natural character. We know no means of overcoming this except by the elimination of both."

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1929 Sir George S Beeby purchased the Griffin-designed *Felstead House* (158 Edinburgh Road) and moved to Castlecrag with his family. Beeby had been a leading figure in the rise of the Labor Party to power in New South Wales, becoming Minister for Labour and Industry in 1910 and introducing a new Industrial Arbitration Act in 1912. He established a centrist Progressive Party in 1913 and in 1920, he was appointed a judge of the Industrial & Arbitration Court. Beeby was also a prominent playwright and his interests made him and his family active members of the Castlecrag community. The large living areas of the *Felstead House* made it a popular meeting place for the community group, Neighbourhood Circle, in the late 1930s and 1940s. Beeby's son, Edward represented Griffin in the Rivett case and his daughter, Doris Isobel, joined the Spanish Relief Movement during the civil war and was a prominent workers' advocate in Australia after the War. She died at Castlecrag in 1948.

1929 The most celebrated of the Castlecrag Griffin Houses, the Fishwick House at 15 The Citadel was built. The client was Thomas W Fishwick, a representative of John Fowler & Co of Leeds. Uilt on a wedge-shaped block in The Citadel, it presents a forbidding narrow façade to the street, but has panoramic views to The Spit. Another Griffin-designed house at 2 The Barquette was constructed for Roy and Beryl Wilson. Ray Wilson worked as a salesman for the GSDA and the design expresses much of the idealism of the community. It demonstrates a linear house form favoured by the Griffins, with the living room at one end. The octagonal living room with its massive fireplace has frequently been used for play readings and other cultural events.



The Fishwick House is the most celebrated of Griffin's houses in Castlecrag

1929 The Ivanhoe Private School was opened by Mrs Walter Trinick at her home in Sunnyside Crescent. It was certified by the Department of Education and operated until circa 1933.

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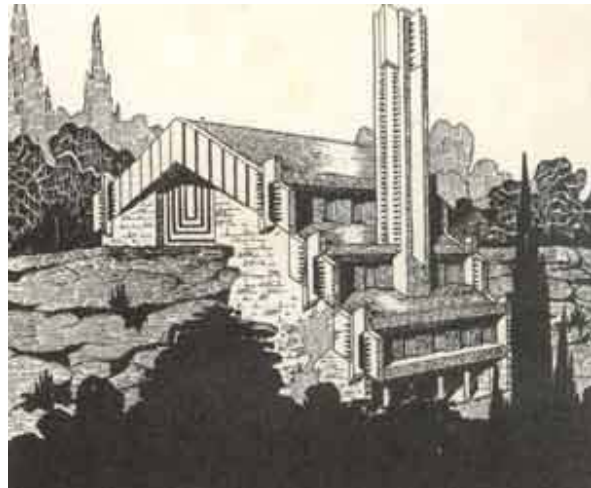
1931 In an Arbor Day ceremony in July, residents help the Griffins plant 250 eucalypts along Edinburgh Road, augmenting 1500 trees and shrubs already planted by members of the Castlecrag Progress Association.

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- 1932 Griffin prepared a plan for the Castlecrag and Haven Estates which, although not executed in full, sets out the streets, walkways and reserves that constitute today's Griffin Conservation Area. Only a few of the allotments planned for The Outlook and The Palisade, now in the suburb of Northbridge, came into being.
- 1933 An architecture student at the University of Sydney, Nancy Price, completed her Bachelor of Architecture thesis 'Walter Burley Griffin' - the first scholarly investigation of Griffin's life and work. She wrote: "The premise at Castlecrag is that houses should be subordinate to the landscape whose indigenous rocks, shrubs, and trees and shores form a complete picturesque natural setting better than any garden setting substitute that could be introduced."
- 1934 The Haven Scenic Theatre (now called Haven Amphitheatre) was designed by Walter and Marion Griffin as a stone tiered amphitheatre for community plays and built by Bim Hilder. The site has perfect acoustics and the bushland setting provided (and continues to provide) wonderful scope for creating realistic stage effects. The first production, in September 1934, was *The Mystery Drama of Eleusis* by Edouard Schuré, directed by Marion Griffin and Lute Drummond. Drama festivals were held four times a year until World War II.
- 1934 The last Griffin house to be built in Castlecrag was erected at 8 The Barbette for Frank and Anice Duncan, who had lived in three other Griffin-designed houses before commissioning their own. The original house was very small and combined knicklock with stone construction. It was superbly integrated with its landscape. The Duncans were active on community life and were keen bush walkers.
- 1934 The Councils of Willoughby, North Sydney, Manly and Warringah submitted a request to the Main Roads Board for a new road, designated an "Express Route", from Manly to the city. This proposal was taken up, but planning work was deferred with the outbreak of War in 1939.

- 1935 The Willoughby Incinerator was built in Naremburn to the design of Griffin and his partner Eric Nicholls for the Reverberatory Incinerator and Engineering Company, providing a new technology to cope with Willoughby's waste disposal problems. The building is regarded as the best surviving example of Griffin's industrial work, a marvellous architectural composition which makes maximum advantage of its hillside setting. Willoughby Council has received acclaim for saving and restoring the building and it is now listed on the Register of the National Estate.



Willoughby Incinerator

- 1930s Vernon Arthur ('Bim') Hilder, son of JJ Hilder, accepted a job with Walter Burley Griffin during the Depression as a carpenter, soon learn a great deal about the basics of design and the creative use of stone and timber. At Castlecrag he soon learned a great deal about the

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basics of design and the creative use of stone and timber. In 1928, he designed and built the house *Wildflower* for his mother, and between 1931 and 1948 he designed and supervised the construction of our more homes in Castlecrag, including his own at 177 Edinburgh Road. His designs strongly reflect the ideas of Griffin. Bim married Roma Hopkinson, a skilled artist, in 1934 and she became a generous and industrious community worker in Castlecrag. He took up sculpture in 1948 while convalescing from an injury and soon excelled in this art form. He won many major awards, including the Wall Enrichment Competition for the Reserve Bank's building in 1963. For 20 years, Bim opened his home once a week to a small group of interested citizens to develop their art skills and he taught sculpture at East Sydney Technical College for 13 years. Bim was awarded an MBE for services to sculpture and the community in 1979.

- 1935 Michael Stoker moved to Castlecrag at the invitation of the Griffins and rented *The Pinnacle* on Edinburgh Road. Michael had strong interests in the theatre and was soon an active performer in the Greek and Shakespearian plays performed at the Haven Theatre and was an active member of the payreaders group. He married Phyllis Cotterell in 1936. They left Castlecrag in 1938, but returned in 1942.
- 1937 Walter Burley Griffin died in India on 11 February. Marion Mahony Griffin returned to Castlecrag in May 1937, residing at the Mower House, 12 The Rampart. She left permanently for the United States at the end of 1938. Griffin's partner, Eric Nicholls, was requested to carry on the architectural business as Managing Director of the GSDA. He designed nine houses in Castlecrag in this period, all of them brick and with tiled roofs. Nicholls resigned from the GSDA and set up his own architectural practice in 1940. The best known of his work in Castlecrag is *Camelot* at 3 The Bastion (1938), which has heritage-listing in Willoughby Council's LEP and has been described as "A thematic design whimsically responding to the romantic layout of Castlecrag." (Graham Jahn, *Sydney Architecture, Watermark*, 1997, p.135).
- 1939 Eastern Valley Way, one of the projects pushed by Griffin and the Progress Association that came to fruition, was officially opened.