

Castle Cove Golf Course

An Assessment of its Griffin heritage

Introduction

The following document is an update of an assessment prepared in 2012 on behalf of the Walter Burley Griffin Society (WBGS) in response to a request from Councillor Judith Rutherford for information on the history of the Castle Cove Golf Course and its heritage significance. It draws on published sources, together with archival research at the University of Melbourne Archives (Cerutti papers), the National Library of Australia (Deans papers), Willoughby City Library and the Willoughby District Historical Society.

Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA)

Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin gained international recognition when their design won the international design competition for the new Federal capital of Canberra on 23 May 1912.

Walter Griffin was subsequently appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction and arrived in Sydney with Marion and his relatives, the Lippincotts, during May 1914. Walter and Marion soon based themselves in Melbourne and set about their task with enthusiasm, but the outbreak of World War I and the frustrations caused by obstacles created by bureaucrats and politicians became too great. Little was achieved in terms of construction at Canberra over the next six years and Walter was forced to resign from the project on 31 December 1920.¹

Griffin had opened an architectural office in Sydney in 1914 and it was retained for an eventual return to that city and its magnificent harbour, which had inspired him from the outset. In 1919 the Sydney office was managed by the architects George Thomas and Frederick Biggs, who Griffin charged with identifying harbour foreshore land with development potential. The following year Griffin secured an option to purchase 263 hectares (650 acres) of land with 6.44 kilometres (4 miles) of Middle Harbour water frontage at the bargain price of £25,000.

To implement his plans, Griffin established a company, the Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA) Limited, with share capital being subscribed by friends and supporters. There were 30 shares issued at £1000 a share, four of which were designated 'A' shares each carrying 10 votes. Three were issued to Griffin as managing director and one to his brother-in-law, Roy Lippincott, giving the Griffins effective control of the company. Initial shareholders included federal politicians King O'Malley, James Catts, Sir Elliot Johnson and Agar Wynne, architects Edward Billson, Roy Lippincott, George Thomas and Frederick Biggs, as well as leading Melbourne businessmen and entrepreneurs such as Julius Grant, Antony Lucas, Malcolm Moore, Chin Wah Moon and Cheok Hong Cheong.

The GSDA land purchased by Thomas and Biggs under instructions from Griffin comprised three parcels of land, which the GSDA Sydney-based secretary, James H Catts, described as follows:

- a) 90 acres adjoining Northbridge on its NW boundary, and is separated from the main property by an oblong wedge of land, north-westerly, probably also about 90 to 100 degrees;

¹ Adrienne Kabos, 'Walter Burley Griffin, Australia (1914-1935)', WBGS website.

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- b) Big 'Sugar Loaf' Peninsula, running into Sugar Loaf Bay, Northerly, and bounded on the SE and NW by 'South Arm' and 'North Arm' respectively. This area is about 154 acres and should be capable of development into the most picturesque self-contained waterside suburb imaginable.
- c) Little 'Sugar Loaf' Peninsula occupies the NW corner of Willoughby Municipality and comprises 406 acres. At the NE extremity of this Peninsula there is a military reserve of about 100 acres and adjoining this, between it and the Company's property, is Henry Willis' 'Castle' of about 400 acres. This area is suitable for a self-contained waterside suburb — it has several miles of good waterfront.²

Walter Griffin identified the 90 acres portion of land on the peninsula he named Castlecrag as the site for his initial model suburb. He had completed an initial sub-division plan in March 1921 and submitted this to Willoughby Council for approval. The Directors gave *"authority to Mr Griffin to arrange for the erection of three cottages or bungalows on the 90 acres at 'strategic' points, at a cost in the vicinity of £90 each"*.³

The GSDA prospectus set out Griffin's aspirations for developing the land as:

High class residential suburbs conserving to the maximum their natural beauty with adequate access to the waterfronts for the public . . . and construction of buildings and all other improvements aesthetically in keeping with the surroundings so far as possible of the native rock, and subordinate to the natural features of the land.⁴

The GSDA directors appointed a Melbourne real estate firm to prepare an assessment of the development potential of the GSDA land on Middle Harbour. Their glowing report raised the expectations of shareholders that they would reap attractive profits for their investment and several sold their shares at this time. Malcolm Moore, the proprietor of the Melbourne engineering firm Malcolm Moore Pty Limited sold a half-share to Charles John Cerutti (1870-1941), the then Assistant Treasury Secretary of the Federal Government and the future Commonwealth Auditor General, for £580 on 14 November 1922.⁵ This transaction was to underlie the future operations of the GSDA and development of the Castlecove golf course.⁶

Cerutti's involvement with the GSDA was based on personal expectations of financial gain and he had little interest in or appreciation of the principles the Griffins sought to demonstrate in their model suburbs on the Middle Harbour peninsulas in Sydney. His personal papers offer insight into an accountant obsessed with procedures and accountability, but he was also prepared to enter into confidential negotiations with fellow conspirators against the Griffins, for whom he had a deep personal dislike. Cerutti was increasingly driven by the failure of the GSDA to deliver anticipated financial rewards and he took a particular dislike to Marion, writing in a confidential letter to the GSDA BJ Parkinson: *"I feel that Mrs G's residence on the property gives her an opportunity for exercising her antagonistic feelings to the Board as now constituted"*.⁷

This conflict escalated over the next two years culminating in special meetings of the Board and Shareholders held over two days in August 1927. Accusations against the Griffins were aired at

² GSDA Limited, Report by Secretary to the Directors, JH Catts, Sydney, 15 April 1921, University of Melbourne Archives, 1990.0096 CJ Cerutti papers, Box 1, File 1921-22.

³ As above.

⁴ GSDA Prospectus, National Library of Australia, Edgar A Deans papers MS2019.

⁵ University of Melbourne Archives, 1990.0096 CJ Cerutti papers, Box 1, File 1921-22

⁶ Griffin named the northern peninsula (and the gold links) 'Castlecove' and this spelling is used in all GSDA historical references in this document. The suburb and the present course are referred to under their official Castle Cove name.

⁷ CJ Cerutti, letter to BJ Parkinson, Solicitor, 12 November 1925, ⁷ University of Melbourne Archives, 1990.0096 CJ Cerutti papers, Box 1, File 1925.

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these meetings and were strongly defended. The outcome was that Griffin formally signed an agreement in early 1928 stating that all litigation between himself and GSDA Board had ceased. His one condition was that Mr BJ Parkinson should retire from the Board and he was replaced by CJ Cerutti in this role, Edgar Deans was appointed GSDA Secretary in Sydney and a new agreement was drawn up for Griffin as Managing Director in order to establish better relations between the Board and the Managing Director.⁸

Planning Castle Cove golf course

The provision of golf links in the form of a 'Country Club' was a feature of advanced garden suburb design in the United States that was familiar to Walter Burley Griffin – indeed, he cites the Kansas City Country Club District (developed by J.C. Nichols from 1906 onwards) in promotional literature for Castlecrag along with Forest Hills Garden, Long Island; Mariemont, Cincinnati; Roland Park, Baltimore; Palos Verdes, Los Angeles and Coral Gables, Miami.⁹ Griffin expressed his desire to include such a golf course in the estates he planned for the GSDA at an early stage, writing in 1922, 'larger reserves, which face the public ways and waterways, are for the use of the suburb as a whole The organising of the chief one, the Country Club, is already in hand.'¹⁰

Documentation of Griffin's plans for a golf course on Little 'Sugar Loaf' Peninsula first appears in 1924 when he sought legal advice from AL Wettenhall of 31 Queen Street, Melbourne, regarding the most suitable arrangement with the planned golf club. Wettenhall advised Griffin on 29 November 1925 that it would be unwise to sell 100 acres of GSDA land to a proposed golf club in exchange for debentures in the company on the grounds of potential difficulty preserving control over the Club if any considerable portion of those debentures were disposed of. Instead, Wettenhall recommended a 10-year lease of the land to the club.¹¹

In April 1928, Edgar Deans reported to GSDA shareholders that:

Work is progressing in regard to contouring the several portions of the Castlecove peninsula with a view to disposing of portion for the purpose of a Golf Club. Nothing of definite character has yet occurred in regard to these negotiations.¹²

The role of the proposed golf course as an integral component of Griffin's 'garden suburbs' being developed on the Middle Harbour peninsulas is described in the GSDA's promotional booklet produced around 1929:

Sports grounds, open air theatres, ovals, golf links, tennis courts, football grounds, etc. have been provided for by the wise foresight which has marked every detail of these Garden suburbs of Middle Harbor.

The Golf links, which have been surveyed for construction, will offer a sporting course of 18 holes within 5 miles of the heart of Sydney. It is characteristic of the Company's determined idealism that tempting private offers to buy this land and lay out the links have been refused. It was typical again

⁸ Minutes of the meetings August 1927 and associated documents, University of Melbourne Archives, 1990.0096 CJ Cerutti papers, Box 2, File 1927.

⁹ *Castlecrag Homes, Sydney, GSDA, c1929, p.21.*

¹⁰ *Walter Burley Griffin, 'Picturesque Waterside Suburb: scenic charm of Castlecrag,' Australian Home Builder, no.1, August 1922, p.51.*

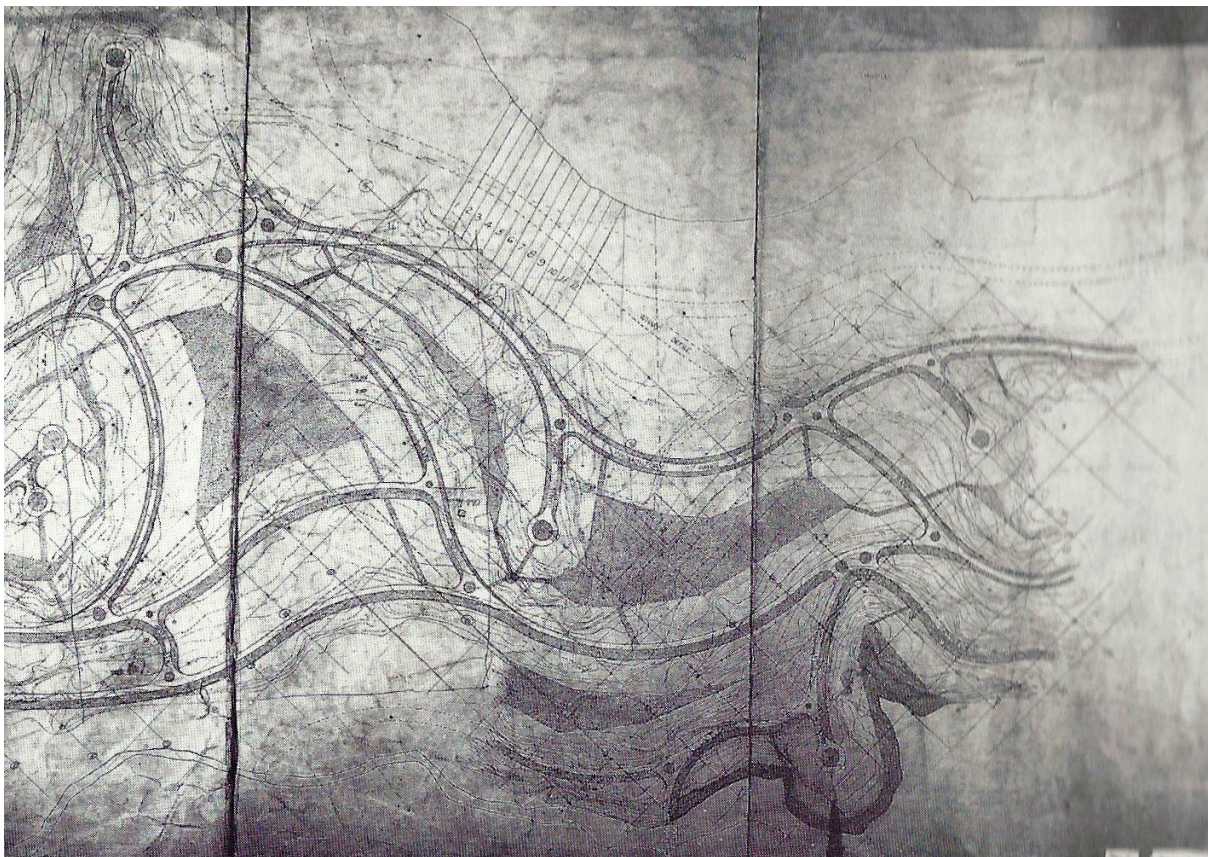
¹¹ Letter AL Wettenhall, 31 Queen Street, Melbourne, to WB Griffin, 35 Blyth Street, Sydney, dated 29 November 1924, re, GSDA Golf Links Proposal; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹² Report to GSDA Shareholders, 16 April 1928, EA Deans, Secretary; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

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of the new spirit that both Castlecrag and Covecrag should have been made sanctuaries of native life, vigilant protection being extended to the birds, opossums, porcupines and soon, it is expected, native bears. Community spirit is a rare and delicate plant but it has made vigorous growth at Castlecrag and its roots go deeper every year.¹³

The statement that the golf course had been established is untrue and it seems that it was never intended to be an 18-hole course. Griffin's landscape design and subdivision plan for the GSDA's Covecrag Estate (now Middle Cove) had been approved by Willoughby Council on 7 December 1926, while the plans for the Castle Cove Estate were drawn up on 13 September 1929. The latter shows the golf course as a central feature linked to a network of walkways providing pedestrian access to bushland reserves behind the residential allotments.¹⁴ While some of the roads for the Covecrag Estate were developed by the GSDA, residential development in these two areas did not occur until the late 1950s.



Portion of the Castlecove Estate sub-division plan by Walter Burley Griffin dated 13 September 1929. The golf course is the shaded area on the right. Turnbull & Navaretti, p. 293.

The Cerutti papers indicate that development of the course had proceeded without his knowledge or involvement, but in September 1930 he wrote to Griffin in the following terms:

None of the Members of the Board other than myself knows anything about golf finance, and at present I do not believe that the venture will be a profitable one. ... I am not prepared to acquiesce in increasing the cost of the initial work of the golf course. ... suggest that before concurring any

¹³ *Castlecrag Homes*, Sydney, GSDA, c1929, p. 14. The claims made here regarding the golf course are ambitions as little work had yet been done on constructing the facility and only a 9-hole course was constructed.

¹⁴ Turnbull, Jeff, and Navaretti, Peter Y, *The Griffins in Australia and India*, Melbourne University Press, 1998, pp. 245 and 293.

expenditure, the Board should have some idea as to the patronage which is likely to be extended to the course.¹⁵

Constructing the golf course

Cerutti's opposition to the proposed course appears to have stimulated Griffin and his colleagues to continue with the golf course project in isolation from the Melbourne-based 'board'. When Cerutti visited Sydney in May 1931 to inspect progress of the 'garden suburbs', he reported to Eric Nicholls, now the GSDA chairman, in the following terms:

When I was in Sydney a couple of days ago, Mr Griffin mentioned in a casual fashion the necessity for expediting the construction of a 'public' golf course on the Little Sugar Loaf Peninsula. I said I had heard nothing of such a proposal, stating that it had not been before the Board and asking him for particulars, and why, in any case, was it urgent. Mr Griffin replied that it was proposed to construct a nine hole golf course of about 3,000 yards for the use of the general public at a cost of £125, a charge of 1s a round of nine holes being made.

I told Mr Griffin the whole project was unsound. It was not the duty of the Company to provide relaxation for the general public. He had no figures to show that in any case it would be a sound investment, and its value for advertising purposes for the Company was extremely doubtful. Moreover, he had taken it upon himself, contrary to several definitely expressed resolutions of the Board, to commit the Company once again to expenditure which had not been approved by the Board. He had not even communicated with the Directors concerning the proposal, excepting a letter he said had been sent two or three days ago. I further said the Company was practically in an insolvent position.¹⁶

Griffin's response was to call a board meeting in Sydney attended by EM Nicholls (chairman), WB Griffin, RE Powell and DC Jenkins, with EA Deans (secretary) in attendance. The meeting formally approved the terms of a contract entered into between Griffin and Mr FB Green on 18 May to oversee the extending and bunkering of the greens and has authorised expenditure of £200 in general terms "for preliminary expenditure". Cerutti was livid at this development, claiming that "the Managing Director, in opposition to the expressed instructions of the Board, incurred expenditure without authority".¹⁷

The contract with Green was evidently an informal agreement authorised by the 'Sydney board' in defiance of Cerutti and the Melbourne shareholders he claimed to represent. As Roy Lippincott observed, the years of "struggle and slander" over Canberra had "inured Walter and Marion to more fighting and they were as contemptuous as ever of authority".¹⁸

The available records do not include any landscape plans signed by Griffin specifically covering detailed features of the course. By now, the golf course was very much a Depression Era project being undertaken on a minimum cost basis with Griffin providing regular supervision of the on-site development activities to plans formulated by Griffin, but which had not been committed to detailed formal documents. Thus, Griffin would have met with Green on site for regular briefings on the course design as he envisaged it, and it was Green's task to undertake the construction.

¹⁵ Letter, Cerutti to WB Griffin, 28 September 1930; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁶ Letter, Cerutti to EM Nicholls, 1 June 1931; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁷ GSDA Minutes of Board Meeting, held 25 Bligh Street, Sydney, 22 June 1931; Letter Cerutti to Deans, 8 July 1931; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁸ McGregor, Alasdair, *Grand Obsessions*, Lantern Books, 2010, p. 393, quoting Roy Lippincott to William Purcell, 26 March 1963, Donald Leslie Johnson papers, NLA MS7817.

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Griffin finally wrote to Cerutti in September 1931 to provide some details about the golf course project:

Work is proceeding so satisfactorily as to justify further extending and bunkering the greens, and enlarging the office and tea rooms. Mr Green estimated that he could enlarge the greens with one man to assist him, in three weeks, at an estimated cost, at £5 per week each, of £30. Mr Green in some degree underestimated the work involved but seven of the greens have been formed and bunkered for £46 with the assistance of two labourers to hasten the opening date. With regard to the building, which was planned 20ft x 10ft, it has been extended to double the size viz: 20ft x 20ft for an extra cost of £15 for walls, which brings the total expenditure to £182 of the £200 appropriated, leaving the balance of Green's contract, £18, payable on completion to exhaust the remainder.¹⁹

The Willoughby Council building permit for the Castle Cove Golf Club Shelter was dated 1931 and the architect being WB Griffin. It had a shallow reinforced concrete domed roof and distinctive sets of French doors. The building consisted of one main dining room with an open fireplace, a kitchen and locker room, with cement floor. It was situated on a knoll overlooking the course.²⁰

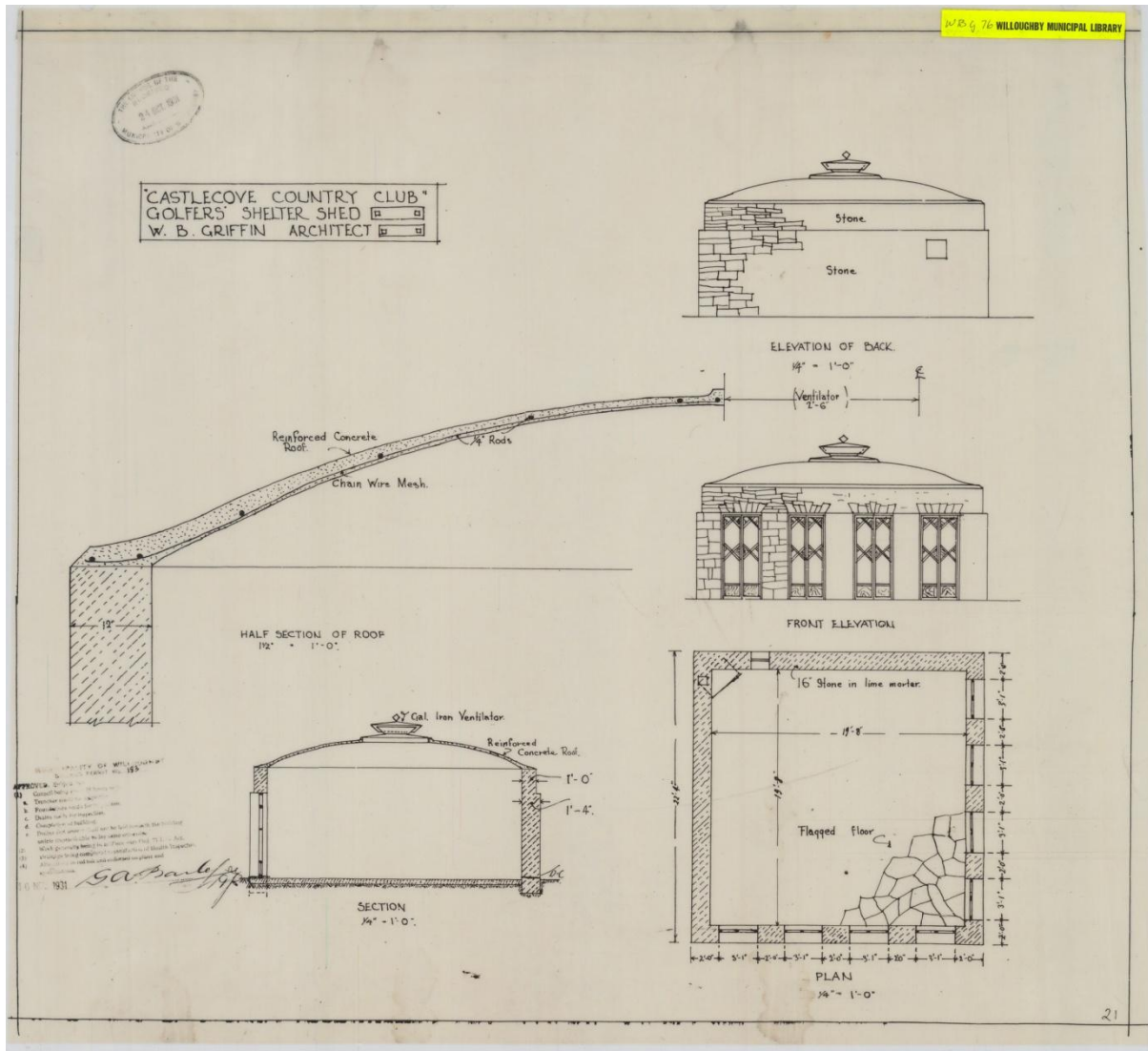
The GSDA financial statement to 31 December 1931 stated that £346 3s 0d (\$27,327 in 2010 values) had been expended to date and it was estimated that another £122 15s would be required to finish the work (\$9658 in 2010 values). The following May, Cerutti reported on his visit to the course, claiming that a total of £750 (equivalent to \$62,200 in 2010 terms) had been spent and he estimated that another £1000 would be required to bring it up to an acceptable standard. Based on his assessment of ongoing maintenance costs, Cerutti concluded that "the whole project is financially unsound and is not likely to be of sufficient appeal to golfers".²¹

¹⁹ Letter, WB Griffin to CJ Cerutti, 24 September 1931; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

²⁰ Turnbull, J and Navaretti, P, *The Griffins in Australia and India – the complete works and projects of WB Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin*, MUP, 1998, pp. 314-5. Castlecove Golf Course file, WDHS archives.

²¹ GSDA Financial Statement, Gold Course expenditure to 31 December 1931; GSDA Golf Course Report, 15 May 1932; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

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Plans for Castle Cove Country Club shelter shed. Willoughby City Library

Opening and managing the course

The course was finally opened on 12 April 1932 with Edgar Deans being given the honour of being the first to tee off. It was the first course in the Municipality of Willoughby, but was isolated from residential areas. Onset of the Depression had brought a sudden end to the GSDA's hopes of developing a model waterside suburb surrounding the course. Council's rate book for 1932 lists the golf course as Lot 42 on Cammeray Road with an area of 21 acres with an unimproved value of £7040 and an improved value of £7400.²²

Griffin was now actively engaged with his work for the Reverberatory Incinerator & Engineering Company which resulted in his departure on a three month business trip to America on 2 June 1932, leaving Deans to be the enthusiastic manager of the new golf course. FB Green was retained as the caretaker to maintain the course, assisted by a part-time labourer. In his reports to Cerutti, Deans was keen to point out that revenue exceeded ongoing expenditure by a considerable margin.

²² Willoughby City Library, Local Studies file 'Castle Cove Country Club'.

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Despite its isolation, the new golf course proved to be popular despite the depressed economic conditions of the time. The initial fees were 1s for a nine-hole round and 1s 6d for 18-holes, but in July 1933 Deans advised that the fees would be 2s a half day and 3s 6d a whole day “once the course is properly established”. Eric Nicholls had formed the Castle Cove Country Club, which had a membership of 130 at that time.²³

The attraction of the Castle Cove golf course was significantly diminished when the first nine holes of the nearby Northbridge Golf Course, developed at considerable cost by Willoughby Council as an unemployment relief scheme from mid-1932, were opened by the NSW Premier Bertram Stevens at a gala event on 13 April 1935. Its spectacular setting overlooking Middle Harbour and the high level of investment in developing the greens made it a far more attractive venue than the low-cost GSDA links at Castle Cove. Moreover, Council continued to invest large amounts of money expanding its new facility into an 18-hole course. The expanded course was inaugurated with an AIF Cup Day on 21 March 1936, which attracted large crowds.²⁴

The competing public course at Northbridge impacted on the GSDA and the Castle Cove Country Club. On 1 June 1936, Edgar Deans wrote to Willoughby Council on behalf of the GSDA advising that due to the loss of golf revenue, the approved plans to construct a dwelling for the professional and make additions to the tea rooms for patron's lockers, etc, would be postponed. Accordingly the kiosk building would be converted to temporary living quarters with provision for the partitions to be removed when required.²⁵

While a mower had been obtained for the greens, there was no tractor or mower to cut the fairways so they had a rough appearance, but according to Esther Leslie, the grass never seemed to grow enough to be an embarrassment. She added: “Any water required for the greens was obtained from a windmill pump near the 8th green, and the sound of the windmill in operation produced a most eerie sound in the surrounding bush”.²⁶

On 27 August 1942, Council's Works Committee considered feature survey and design plans submitted by the GSDA for the first portion of the Castle Cove area. It decided that Council was not prepared to approve the plans submitted, but would give favourable consideration to plans along similar lines that incorporated a principal road off Kendall Road extending easterly along the northern boundary of the golf links, a reservation for park and recreational purposes and retention of the MW&SB track from Eastern Valley Way to Cammeray Road. Council was also prepared to discuss the possible acquisition of the land known as the ‘Castlecove Golf Links’.²⁷

The Castle Cove Country Club survived, however, and eventually a horse-drawn mower was obtained, city water was laid on, a liquid gas lighting system was installed in the clubhouse and a telephone was connected.

²³ Letter, Deans to Cerutti, 6 July 1932; Letter, Deans to Cerutti, 6 July 1933; ; CJ Cerutti papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

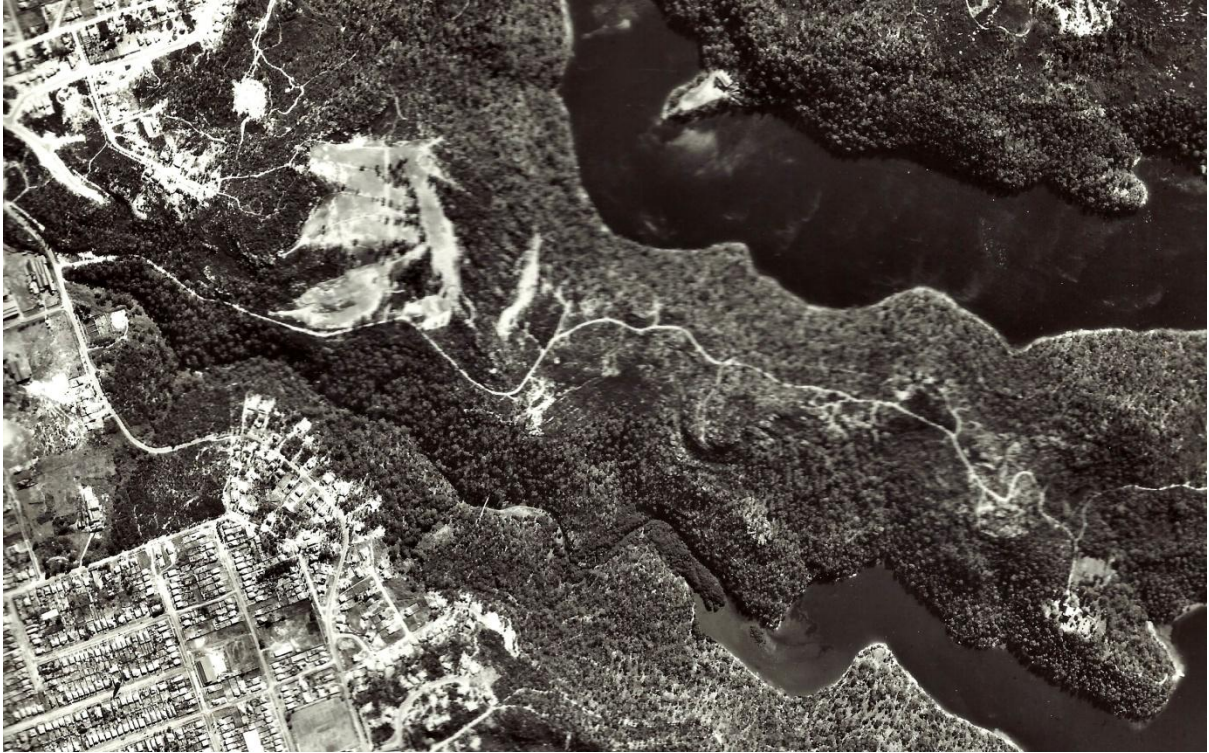
²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 11 July 1933, p. 11, Relief Work; Dates for the Northbridge Golf Course development from the David Warner Photo Collection, WDHS archives.

²⁵ GSDA letter, 1 June 1936, WMC file 248.2/36, Willoughby City Library, Local Studies file ‘Castlecove Country Club’.

²⁶ Esther Leslie, *The Development of Castle Cove and Middle Cove*, Chatswood, Willoughby Municipal Council, 1988, pp 75-78.

²⁷ ‘Report of proceedings of meeting of the Works Committee held on 27th August 1942’, Willoughby City Library, Local Studies file ‘Castlecove Country Club’.

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Aerial view of the Castle Cove Peninsula in 1943 showing the golf course (centre left) in its bushland setting. Courtesy Willoughby DHS.



The 8th green in the 1940s showing the windmill and the shelter shed/kiosk on the knoll above.
WDHS collection, donated by Mr & Mrs E Maher

John ('Jack') Joseph Hagar was appointed as the Country Club's professional around 1942 and he subsequently leased the course from the GSDA in partnership with a fellow golf professional,

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Archie Keane. Jack Hagar was appointed manager of the Castle Cove Country Club in 1952-53 and remained in this position until the club was formally incorporated in 1956-57.²⁸

Around 1956, the GSDA sold its land on the Castle Cove Peninsula to LJ Hooker Limited, which drew up plans for residential development, including the land utilised for the golf course unless Willoughby Council could purchase the land for around £70,000. The East Roseville Progress Association lobbied Council to retain the area as a recreational area and to support the proposal submitted to the Cumberland County Council for its use as a private recreational area. Council resolved to convene a meeting between the progress association, Cumberland County Council and golf club representatives to consider the proposal at its meeting on 19 August 1957.²⁹

The golf community suffered a major blow in July 1957, however, when fire destroyed the clubhouse and all it contained. Members rallied to convert the corrugated iron machinery shed into a temporary clubhouse by the following weekend and play continued.³⁰



Another 1940s view with golfers on the 8th green and the shelter shed/kiosk in the background. WDHS collection, donated by Mr & Mrs E Maher

²⁸ 'John Joseph Hagar and the Castle Cove Country Club', hand-written note of interview c1977, Willoughby City Library, Local Studies file 'Castlecove Country Club'.

²⁹ *The Clarion*, 17 July 1958, 'Big project at Castlecove'; Willoughby Municipal Council Ordinary Meeting minutes, 19 August 1957, Item 1385, Willoughby City Library Local studies file, 'Castle Cove Golf Course'.

³⁰ Esther Leslie, 1988, as above.

While the Castle Cove golf course was isolated from existing residential areas and opened at the height of the Great Depression, it attracted a higher level of membership than anticipated. This paradox highlights the growing popularity of golf during the 1930s Depression. Various elements of this have been put forward by historians in recent years, including the success of Australian golfers on the international stage and the availability of motor cars to transport players and their equipment to golf courses.

While social historians have focused on the hardship faced by ordinary Australians during the Great Depression, this by no means applied to all Australians. As Gerald Stone documents in his book *1932: A hell of a year*, many of Sydney's well-to-do families prospered during the Depression years, taking advantage of cheap hired help to maintain an active social life. They continued to spend lavishly on home improvements, their children continued at expensive private schools, the social whirl of cocktail parties and gala balls scarcely missed a beat and the Royal Sydney Golf Club's 2473 members continued to pay its hefty fees.³¹

The popularity of the new golf courses at Castle Cove and Northbridge during the 1930s indicates that there were sufficient individuals in the area with the time and resources to take up golf at this time. There is, accordingly, scope for further research into the social history of golf on the Lower North Shore during this era.

Subsequent history

The long-term future of the course was finally secured in July 1959 when extensive negotiations between Council, LJ Hooker, Cumberland Country Council and the Castle Cove Golf Club culminated in an agreement regarding the future of the course. LJ Hooker would sell three lots of land amounting to 24 acres to Council at the lowest price (estimated to be £6000) and the club would buy four lots. The club would develop a country club with extensive facilities, including a swimming pool, putting greens, dining room and some accommodation.³² A substantial club house designed by the well-known architect and Castlecrag resident Harold Smith was subsequently constructed on the site.

In its 1996 'Plan of Management: Castle Cove Park and Castle Cove Golf Course', Willoughby City Council rate the park and golf course of local and district significance. The parks were noted as: 'a buffer between houses and enhance the high quality parkland character of the suburbs'. In terms of its historical background, the document states:

Castle Cove Golf Course (11 hectares) was designed by Walter Burley Griffin about 1924 and constructed during the Great Depression by Government subsidised labour on land owned by Burley Griffin's company, the Greater Sydney Development Association Ltd. L J Hooker took over ownership of the course in the late 1950s with plans to subdivide. This was actively opposed and eventually the deeds of the course were transferred to Willoughby Council for ten shillings. Castle Cove Country Club, which was formed in 1932, leased the land from Council and purchased adjoining land to build their clubhouse and parking area, and to stop residential development between the fairways.³³

³¹ Stone, Gerald, *1932: A hell of a year*, Sydney, Macmillan, 2005, pp 153-157.

³² *The Clarion*, 17 July 1958, 'Big project at Castlecove'.

³³ 'Plan of Management: Castle Cove Park and Castle Cove Golf Course', Willoughby City Council, 1996, p 3.

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The 1996 Management Plan is based on sketchy evidence and some assertions (eg, that the course was developed with Government subsidised labour) are clearly incorrect. Nevertheless, the above assessment presents evidence that the Castle Cove golf course has a special association with Walter Burley Griffin and the vision for the Middle Harbour headlands he promoted through the Greater Sydney Development Association, together with the citizen campaign which saved the golf course site from residential development in the 1950s.

Conclusion

The development of model waterside estates that integrated with the landscape became the passion of both Walter and Marion Griffin and the development of a 'Country Club' based around a golf course was a core element of their vision for the Middle Harbour headlands, promoted from the earliest days of the GSDA venture in line with advanced 'garden suburb' design principles of that era in the United States. Specific proposals for golf links were put forward by Griffin from 1924 and they form a central element of the subdivision plan for the Castlecove Estate drawn up in 1929.

The Castle Cove golf course was created within an attractive bush setting characterised by sandstone rock formations, indigenous trees and shrubs. The conservation of such settings through sensitive suburban development was the distinguishing feature of Walter and Marion Griffins' vision for the headlands stretching from Castlecrag to Castle Cove.

The evidence indicates that Griffin oversaw the landscape design for the course, but did not commit his ideas to a formal plan. There have been a number of alterations to the layout of the fairways, bunkers and greens since 1932, while the delightful Griffin-designed clubhouse and windmill that gave the course a special flavour have long gone. Today, the location and shape of the course differs from the form depicted in the 1929 plan. The significance of the course, however, resides in it being the only such feature associated with the Griffins' Australian work.

In another dimension, the Castle Cove golf course has a special significance well beyond its local boundaries. Possibly paramount among all the projects completed by Walter and Marion Griffin during their time at Castlecrag, this important place tells the story of the emotional damage they bore from conflict within the Greater Sydney Development Association as commercial pressures bore down upon the idealism of the venture. The provision of a 'Country Club' was a vital element of the waterside estates that the Griffins sought to establish, but its method of implementation was also an act of defiance against the Melbourne-based GSDA shareholders and their spokesperson, the formidable Charles John Cerutti.

Thus, the Castle Cove golf course provides unique insights into the operations of the GSDA and the response of its competing elements during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It is tangible evidence of the Griffins' landscape vision for Middle Harbour, and determination to create a country club for the local community, which in setting and use, expresses continuity from the time it was created to the present. The conservation of the Castle Cove golf course, protected from residential development by a citizen campaign in the 1950s when the GSDA estates were bought by LJ Hooker, also expresses the social and environmental values inspired by the Griffins that have characterised the Middle Harbour community since the 1920s.

Bob McKillop

Castlecrag, [7 August 2013](#)