

WILLOUGHBY HISTORY CHATTERS

DECEMBER 2017

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THE ART OF FASHION: 1920s evening gowns

Presented by the Cavalcade of History and Fashion, our event at the Willoughby Uniting Church on Sunday 8 October was a great success. There was a large appreciative audience and the event was a financial success for the Society.

Women from the Cavalcade of History and Fashion at Pymble presented

an interesting selection of women's evening gowns from the 1920s. Following the presentation, attendees enjoyed a 'High Tea' in the Church Hall over enthusiastic discussion over an excellent selection of fine refreshments..

The following photos from Mary Thom (top) and Rob Wilson capture the event.



COMING EVENTS

Sunday 3 December:
WDHS Christmas Function at Willoughby Museum (see p6).

Saturday 10 February:
Willoughby District Historical Society AGM from 2pm.

MUSEUM UPDATE: More on our *City Surface* Exhibition

The *City Surface* Genesis exhibition created by WDHS committee member Rob Wilson has drawn highly positive responses from visitors to the Willoughby Museum. The exhibition which features 28 A2 size panels, each featuring a collage of photo images on specific buildings and street features in Willoughby City that focus on particular feature, such as chimneys on heritage Federation houses, road art or the changing building skyline of the Chatswood Central Business District.

There has been a range of visitors since the opening of the exhibition on 10 September and many of them have been particularly enthusiastic about their experience. The exhibition will remain open on Sunday afternoons until Sunday 3 December, when we hold our annual Christmas function for members and friends. We will retain this exhibition in the New Year, when the Museum will reopen on 29 January 2018.



ABOVE: The entry panels to the *City Surface Genesis* Exhibition at the Willoughby Museum.

BELOW: *City Surface* public art panels in the *City Surface Genesis* exhibition.



MEMBERS' CORNER

We welcome Nicholas Gysi, a new volunteer at the museum. Nicholas is enthusiastic regarding Australian history and has been helping Bob McKillop photographing objects in our extensive collection and entering the images into our MOASiC data base.

Members are advised that your renewals for the 2018 year can be made at the Christmas function for members

and friends of the Society on Sunday 3 December. If you cannot attend this function, renewal forms will be mailed out shortly after this event.

OBJECTS UPDATED INTO OUR COLLECTION SYSTEM

Among the interesting items recently updated in our MOSAiC database at the Museum are an 1890s soda syphon made by the British Soda Manufacturing Company, an electric jug made in Sydney in the 1920s, a Bendigo Pottery coffee pot and a ceramic pastry rolling pin. Images of three of these items are presented here.



THE HILDER FAMILY IN CASTLECRAG

The well-known Australian watercolour artist **Jesse Jewhurst Hilder** (1881–1916) was born in Toowoomba, Queensland. On joining the Bank of New South Wales, he worked at Goulburn (from February 1901) and then Bega (June 1902) where he sold his first paintings. Following his transfer to Sydney in April 1904, Hilder studied art under Julian Ashton's late afternoon classes.

J J Hilder first exhibited at the Society of Artists, Sydney, in 1907 where his work made quite a sensation. In 1906 he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and, following his marriage to Phyllis Meadmore in April 1909, he became a full-time professional artist. The couple moved frequently seeking a more suitable climate for Jesse, but despite his emerging fame as an artist, he suffered increasing bouts of illness. J J Hilder died of pulmonary tuberculosis at Inglewood on 10 April 1916 and was buried in the Anglican section of Rookwood cemetery.

He was survived by his wife and two sons. **Phyllis Hilder** resumed the training she had abandoned at her marriage and qualified as a nurse. By the mid-1920s the family had moved to the suburb Castlecrag on Middle Harbour. Over the subsequent decades they played a prominent role in the artistic and community life of Castlecrag and the wider Sydney region. Phyllis became passionate about the surrounding bushland at Castlecrag, taking groups on bush walks and establishing a wildflower garden in her front garden.

Vernon Arthur ('Bim') Hilder (1909–1990) became a leading Australian sculptor, printmaker and painter who was active during the middle decades of the twentieth century. He left school at the age of 15 and enrolled in a five-year commercial art course at East Sydney Technical College, but after a year he accepted a job with a builder. **Walter Burley Griffin** soon offered him a job as a carpenter constructing his houses in Castlecrag, an experience that enabled him to observe and embrace many of the architect's design principles. Bim studied etching under Sydney Long in 1928 and showed his works with the Australian Painter–Etcher's Society in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

When Bim asked Griffin to design a house for Phyllis, the key stipulation was that it should have sufficient wall spacing to hang her husband's paintings. Griffin ignored this request and designed a house with many windows, an action that provoked a rift between the families. Phyllis pur-

chased three adjoining blocks of land on the northern side of Edinburgh Road and in 1929 and Bim designed a stone residence, *Wildflower*, to meet his mother's needs. *Wildflower*, which had Griffin's patent roof knit-lock tiles, still stands although it has had recent renovations under its owner Tony Taussig. A selection of the tiles have gone to the National Museum of Australia, while the bulk went to Melbourne to restore a Eric Nicholls' designed bunkhouse at Camp Manyung at Mt Eliza.

Bim married fellow artist in Roma Hopkinson in 1934 and she became a generous and productive community worker in Castlecrag. He designed and built a stone house at 177 Edinburgh Road for his family and he played a leading role in the construction of The Haven Amphitheatre, which was also completed in 1934. He built two other houses in Castlecrag, including one for his brother Brett and his wife Tilly.

During World War II, Bim worked as a camouflage artist, and then around 1950 he turned his attention to sculpture work. He became an inaugural member of the Society of Sculptors & Associates in 1951 and served twice as president. A major breakthrough came in 1962 when he won the competition to design a 'wall enrichment' sculpture for the new Reserve Bank building in Martin Place, Sydney. This work and his 1965 **Griffin Memorial Fountain** sculpture in Castlecrag are his best-known public art works.

Bim commenced teaching sculpture in 1962, initially at the East Sydney Technical College, and then at the University of NSW. In 1976 he had a one-man sculpture exhibition at the David Jones Gallery with 19 works priced between \$150 and \$1700. He was awarded an OBE for his services to art in 1978.

Brett HILDER (1911–1981), the second son of J J and Phyllis Hilder, was born at Epping in Sydney. He moved to Castlecrag with his mother and brother the mid-1920s and in 1927 he joined the Australian trading company Burns Philp as a sailor. His journeys took him to the Dutch East Indies, where he met his Dutch wife Tilly, and the South Pacific. He became a ship's master in the next decade and during World War II he taught navigation to Australian air crews and later flew Catalina

flying boats for the RAAF.

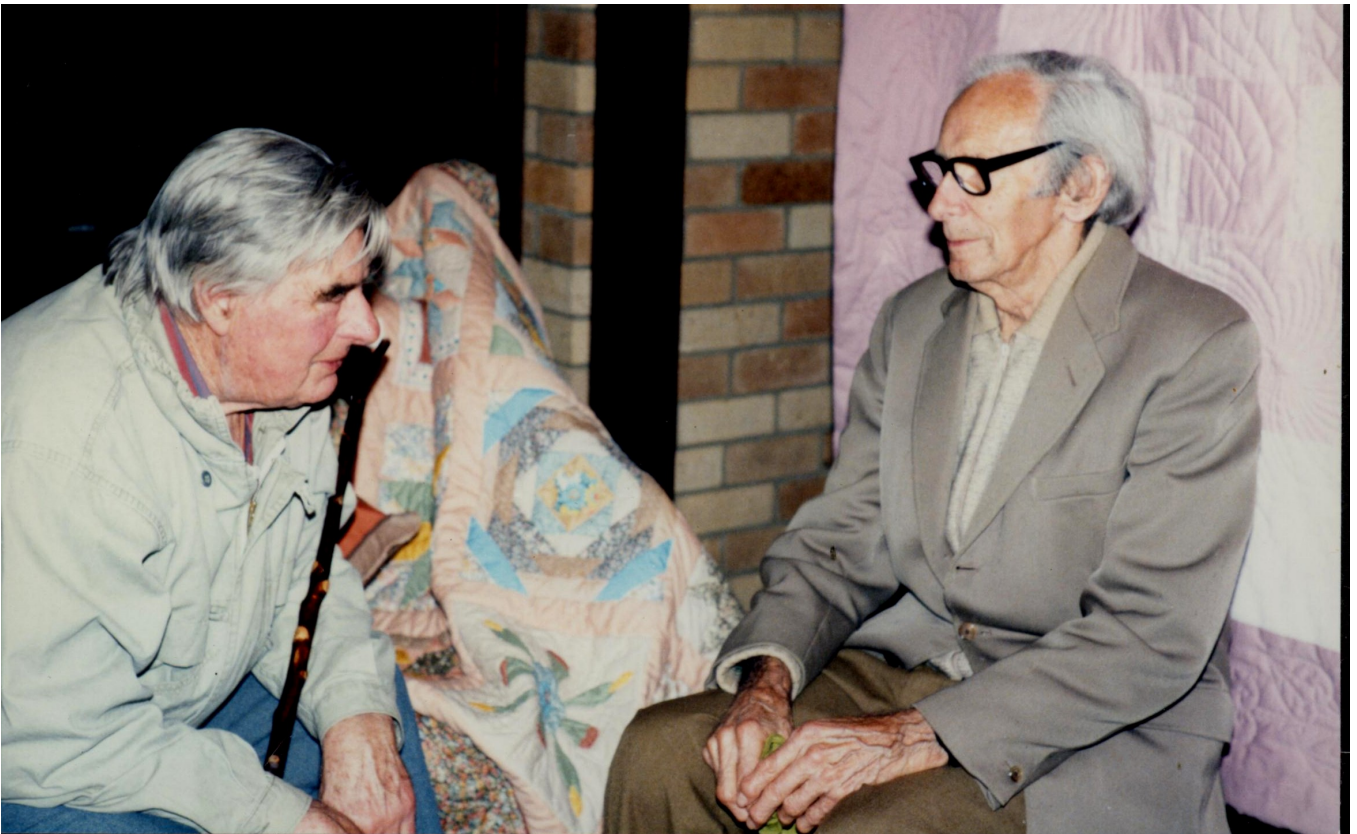
Brett Hilder started painting and drawing during the war, producing watercolour landscapes and portraits of the people and places he visited. After the war he resumed his position as a Burns Philp sea captain and often took small groups of artist friends with him on journeys to the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands, where they would paint and draw while the ship was being loaded at isolated plantations and islands.

Brett Hilder wrote extensively on navigation and his travels for magazines such as *Walkabout* and he published three books: *Navigator in the South Seas* (Percival Marshall, 1961), *The Heritage of J J Hilder* (Ure Smith, 1966) and *The Voyage of Torres* (Univ of Qld Press, 1980). Bim and Tilly's son **Julius Wilfred ('Wilf') Hilder** (1934–2011) took on his grandmother's passion for the unique landscape and flora of the local bush and became a bush walking trail-blazer in New South Wales. He became a knowledgeable leader and president of several bushwalking clubs and wrote articles and booklets for these groups that detailed hundreds of walks.

Bob McKillop

END NOTES

- 1 Smith, Bernard, 'Hilder, Jesse Jewhurst (1881–1916)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, 1983, Melbourne University Press.
- 2 Beatrice Hilder-Yell, 'Obituary Wilf Hilder', *The Crag*, October 2011.
- 3 Spathopoulos, Wanda, *The Crag: Castlecrag 1924-1938*, Blackheath, Brandl & Schlesinger, 2007, pp 260-261.
- 4 *The Crag*, No. 70, June/July 1990, 'President's Report', p. 1; No. 147, April 2001, p. 4.
- 5 Clifford-Smith, Silas, 'Bim Hilder', *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*.
- 6 Spathopoulos, Wanda, as above, p 192.
- 7 Interview EA Harvey at 9 The Battlement, Castlecrag, 21 October 1986.
- 8 Beatrice Hilder-Yell, 'Obituary Wilf Hilder', *The Crag*, October 2011.



Bim Hilder (left) and Frank Duncan at the Castlecrag Progress Association 60th Anniversary, 24 October 1985. Rita Kaye photo, Castlecrag PA



A close-up view of the Walter Burley Griffin designed clubhouse at the Castle Cove Country Club golf course circa 1933. Sadly, the clubhouse and all its contents were lost in a fire in July 1957. National Library of Australia, vn3991984

CONTACTS

WDHS Management Committee:

President: Paul Storm (9419 7354)

Vice-President: Mary Thom

Secretary: Terry Fogarty

Museum Curator: Bob McKillop

Committee Members: Joan Antarakis, Don Swonnell, Rob Wilson

Patron: Gail Giles-Gidney, Mayor of Willoughby City

Newsletter Editor: Bob McKillop

Willoughby Museum

Our museum is located at *Boronia*, 58 Johnson Street, Chatswood.

Opening hours: 1-4pm each Sunday.
Admission \$6 adults; \$5 concession; \$3 child, \$10 family [Note: latter under review].

COMING EVENTS

Members' Meetings

Held at the Willoughby Room, Willoughby City Library at The Concourse, commencing at 2pm on the second Saturday of even months (except December).

Sunday 3 December 2017: Willoughby DHS Annual, 58 Christmas event at the Willoughby Museum Johnson Street from 2-4pm. Members and friends are welcome, but are encouraged to bring a plate for the afternoon tea. Weather permitting, this will offer a garden setting with afternoon refreshment and entertainment, together with a hamper raffle. Don Swonnell will entertain us with a new selection of poetry reading.

Saturday 10 February 2018: The Willoughby District Historical Society's Annual General Meeting will be held in the Willoughby Room from 2.00pm. Members and Friends welcome.

Tours & Events

City Surface exhibition: Our new exhibition created by Rob Wil-

son will continue into the New Year, with Sunday 3 December being the last opening day for 2017. The museum reopening on Sunday 29 January 2018.

Book a tour: The Willoughby District Historical Society and Museum can offer a range of guided walking tours of heritage sites, conservation areas and bushland walks in the Willoughby City area. If you and your friends are interested in such tours, please contact us by phone or email as per the details on the right.

WILLOUGHBY DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

As noted on page 3, memberships may be renewed at the Members and Friends Christmas function at the Willoughby Museum on 3 December. For those unable to attend this even, you will receive membership renewal forms shortly afterwards.

Bob McKillop, A/Treasurer