



## CANBERRA, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

One hundred years ago, Chicago based architects Walter Burley Griffin and his wife, Marion Mahoney Griffin, entered (and won) the competition to design the capital city for Australia, which had become a Federation in 1901. The design competition attracted 137 entries from around the world.

Many of the drawings (prepared by Marion) are owned by the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and are exquisite examples of her work and her drawing skills. But Griffin historians have long been aware that there was a gap in the works of the pair. A few months ago, the last missing document for the design of Canberra was found and handed over to the Archives. The 29 page, unevenly typed and handbound document, created in 1911, was discovered among old plans in a storage container in the industrial suburb of Fyshwick earlier this year.<sup>1</sup>

The booklet is designed in an unusually tall format favoured by Mrs Griffin and features 16 competition drawings by the Griffins as part of their entry. Also found in the document were five hand drawn diagrams that were key elements of the original plan for the capital. The drawings for Canberra were completed in about nine weeks - Walter had been procrastinating and was threatened by Marion that she wouldn't undertake the drawings if he didn't hurry up with the designs. The result from Marion was "a beguilingly simple suite of drawings" that vividly displayed the "lofty visions and grand ideas" of the Griffins, without showing any signs of having been "dashed off under the spectre of a looming deadline".<sup>2</sup>

The located booklet features spelling and typing errors which historians say illustrate the couple's panic to submit an entry to the competition on time. As it turned out, the entry just made it to the last train from Chicago to San Francisco, just in time to meet the last ship to Australia.

The document is currently on display at Parliament House and will feature in the National Archives' exhibition, Design 29: Creating a Capital, to celebrate Canberra's centenary in 2013.

<sup>1</sup> [www.abc.net.au/news/2012-05-23/last-griffin-document-joins-national-archives/4028392](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-05-23/last-griffin-document-joins-national-archives/4028392)

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair McGregor, "Grand Obsessions", 2009, p. 133



## MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA MANCHESTER UNITY BUILDING

The prominent corner of central Melbourne, at Collins and Swanston, was transformed in 1932 by the completion of the Manchester Unity building. Designed by the young architect, Marcus Barlow, the eleven storey building was completed in just over eight months.

A major feature of the building was the exterior finishing of biscuit-coloured terracotta tiles (or blocks). Between 1925 and 1940, many buildings were finished in terracotta which became a prized building material famed for adaptability, colour and affordability. Each terracotta block was secured to the building frame with metal angles, dowels or ties. The technique was relatively new to Melbourne and was considerably cheaper than traditional methods - the cost of each block was estimated as only a tenth of the price of an equivalent piece of carved stone.<sup>1</sup> Eighty years on, the blocks remain in place but are starting to show signs of damage and need a lot of attention. The terracotta was cleaned in 1962 and possibly re-pointed at that time.<sup>2</sup> Problems with terracotta facing can derive from a number of sources, including faulty original craftsmanship; stress-related deterioration; damage caused by later alterations and additions; or inappropriate repairs. A major cause of problems is water-related, producing deterioration problems as glaze crazing (the formation of small random cracks in the glaze), glaze spalling (the partial loss of the masonry material itself caused commonly by water trapped within the masonry system itself), and deteriorated metal anchoring, where water enters the glazed terra-cotta and rusts the anchoring system and substantially weakens or completely disintegrated the elements.<sup>3</sup>

The Chairman of the Building Owners' Corporation, (Dr. Kia Pajouhesh) owns a dental practice in the building, as well as the original boardroom, top floor and tower. He has commenced a campaign to raise the funds (estimated at around \$4m) to replace or repair the terracotta blocks and is seeking support from the State Government, the City of Melbourne, the corporate world, heritage preservation and



community groups and individuals.

To assist with the campaign, Barry Humphries has been appointed patron of the building that is one of his favourites in Melbourne. One of his duties is to shout from the rooftop about the need for repairs to ensure the Commercial Gothic beauty keeps charming the city.<sup>4</sup> In late September the building will be floodlit, as it was when it opened in 1932.

A group called 'Friends of Manchester Unity Building' has been established and will be carrying out a number of activities. One initiative (called '\$80 for 80 years') will allow supporters of the building to pay a sum of \$80 for the rejuvenation of one tile. Those who support the initiative will receive a certificate and can decide for themselves if they want to respect the age of the building or to focus on the next 80 years.

At the same time, a new history of the building is being prepared. The author is Sandra Makris, an ADMS member, who is currently compiling historical records and recollections of tenants and customers for the work, expected to be released in 2013. If you have any stories about the building, she would love to hear from you at [info@buildingbusiness.com.au](mailto:info@buildingbusiness.com.au). Naturally, ADMS is offering its assistance with research on the building. One area of research being undertaken by ADMS is a photographic essay of the three groups of panels in the foyer - plaster friezes that depict life in Australia, largely pastoral; marble panels that depict the values and services associated with Manchester Unity, with allegorical imagery associated with "Life", "A Loan for a Home", "Education", "Rendering Public Service", "Self Dependence", "Tending the Sick", "Financial Security", "Defending Widows and Orphans", and "Death"; and a smaller series of panels consisting of scenes related to sports, construction and transport. The research will also cover plaster friezes throughout the building, including the Board Room.

<sup>1</sup> Natica Schmeder, "Architectural Terracotta: the Colour of Art Deco," *Spirit of Progress*, Vol 9 No 3, 2008, p. 17

<sup>2</sup> Manchester Unity Building, Conservation Management Plan, Allom Lovell & Associates, November 2005, p. 33

<sup>3</sup> [www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief07.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief07.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.theage.com.au/national/melbourne-life/barry-gets-his-teeth-into-art-deco-beauty-20120812-242nk.html#ixzz24XBIOFzZ](http://www.theage.com.au/national/melbourne-life/barry-gets-his-teeth-into-art-deco-beauty-20120812-242nk.html#ixzz24XBIOFzZ)